LAY
SERMONS
FROM THE
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By M. C. E.

WITH PREFACE BY
J. ST. LOE STRACHEY

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PREFACE

As all the essays included in this volume appeared in the *Spectator*, it would hardly be in place for me to commend them. That would be too like being judge in one's own cause. At the same time, I do not like to refuse the request of the publishers, who have undertaken to bring them before the public in book form, that I should write a few words of Preface. It is my firm belief that the essays are well worthy of the most careful consideration of all who hold, as I do, that unless their religious instincts are first awakened and then satisfied, the bulk of men will be either brutish or unhappy, or both. I hold further that the highest satisfaction for those instincts is to be found in Christianity, and in Christianity alone.

The essays are spiritual in their appeal—not doctrinal. But since they are intended for the layman rather than the ecclesiastic, they are, I venture to say, none the worse for that. They can claim, however, on other grounds than these to be well fitted to enlist the sympathies of the general reader. I have

little doubt that what, as a rule, prevents the ordinary layman from reading religious books is the kind of horror, possibly an exaggerated horror, which he has of anything that he regards as sanctimonious or unctuous, or, again, that has about it an air of technical or professional religiousness. The English layman hates the pomp and circumstance of ecclesiastical terminology. Again, he always feels that there is something almost blasphemous in the definiteness or cocksureness with which ecclesiastics often state their beliefs. On the other hand, inconsistent though it may seem, the layman is intolerant of what he regards as "hedging"—the refusal to face the consequences of some theological dogma and to meet it, as he would say, fairly and squarely.

I am far from saying that these essays always succeed in this last respect. To untie every religious knot and dissolve every religious mystery would be to rise to a height of more than human prescience. I do, however, sincerely believe that these essays will attract the lay mind on the ground of most of the negative qualifications which I have just stated. They exercise, in a word, that liberty of prophesying which is the noblest

possession and richest endowment of the Church of England. If Jeremy Taylor's test is accepted no man could condemn them though many may disagree with them. They are a sincere and reverent effort to bring home Gospel truth to the hearts of men. How far they succeed is another matter. At any rate, the effort is there, and no true Christian will deny the Christianity of such an effort.

J. ST. LOE STRACHEY.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
	PREFACE	v
I.	THE POWER OF THE PSALMS	1
II.	VOX CLAMANTIS !	8
III.	THE MIND OF ST. PETER	16
IV.	TERTULLIAN AND THE PLAIN MAN	23
V.	THE SAYINGS OF CHRIST	32
VI.	THE " LATITUDE-MEN "	40
VII.	THE APOCALYPSE	49
VIII.	THE CHRIST OF ENGLISH POETRY	57
IX.	THE BIBLE AS A BOOK	64
X.	CHRIST AND CONVICTION	73
XI.	" THE HEART OF A STRANGER "	81
XII.	THE HOPE OF THE WORLD	88
XIII.	CHRISTIANITY AND THE CONSCIENCE	95
XIV.	CHRISTIANITY AND REVIVAL	103
XV.	CHRIST AND THE SENSE OF JUSTICE	109
XVI.	" THE IMITATION OF CHRIST "	117
XVII.	FACING LIFE	126
XVIII.	THE VITAL SPARK IN CHRISTIANITY	133
XIX.	THE INSTINCT OF PRAYER	140
XX.	COMPASSION	147
XXI.	CHRISTIANITY AND ANXIETY	155
XXII.	A JUDGE AND A DIVIDER	162
XXIII.	GODLINESS AND GRAVITY	169
XXIV.	THE SCRIPTURAL FOOL	177
XXV.	WHAT IS RELIGION ?	184

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
XXVI.	A DUAL PEOPLE.	193
XXVII.	THE DREAMS OF THE BIBLE . .	201
XXVIII.	THE MESSAGE OF JEREMIAH . .	209
XXIX.	THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD .	218
XXX.	"THE EARTH WITH HER BARS" . .	227
XXXI.	THE EPIC OF PATIENCE . . .	235
XXXII.	ST. AUGUSTINE	245
XXXIII.	THE CHANGELESSNESS OF COMMON-SENSE	254
XXXIV.	"A KNIGHT-ERRANT OF GOD" . .	264
XXXV.	"THE FIRST TRUE GENTLEMAN" .	273
XXXVI.	COMMON-SENSE IN THE GOSPELS .	281
XXXVII.	"THE LORD'S FREEMAN" . . .	289

Lay Sermons

CHAPTER I

THE POWER OF THE PSALMS

WHAT is the secret of the unceasing popularity of the Psalms?

The fact that these religious lyrics should appeal so powerfully to the Western mind is an astonishing one, if we look at it from the outside. The Psalms come out of a civilisation so far removed from our own that we can only partly understand it. They were written in a language which had no affinity with ours. Their theology is not the theology of the millions who love them. Their morality is in an essential point in flat opposition to the morality of Christendom. Their philosophy of life is not the philosophy of Christianity. We find it difficult to deny that some of them were written to express the narrow worship of a tribal god. We must admit that few of them suggest any hope of a life after death. Jehovah, whose

"Name is great in Israel," who "dwelleth at Jerusalem," who "sitteth between the cherubims," the Lord of Hosts and the God of Jacob, for ever upon the side of the Jew, is a conception so overlaid with a peculiar form of patriotism that we can hardly declare its identity with that of the God of the New Testament. The poet who lamented that "in death no man remembereth thee," did not look for the Resurrection; and he who prayed that his enemy might "fall from one wickedness to another: and not come into thy righteousness," had not caught the faintest glimpse of that light which was later on to lighten the Gentiles and remain the glory of Israel. Right through the Psalms runs the bright assurance that righteousness pays. "What man is he that lusteth to live: and would fain see good days? Keep thy tongue from evil: and thy lips, that they speak no guile. Eschew evil, and do good: seek peace, and ensue it," they taught. Where experience seemed to contradict the theory, the Psalmist twists it into harmony by an exhortation to look ahead. Those who are sufficiently far-sighted are not puzzled, he says, by the seeming prosperity of the wicked. They "see the end of these men." Such was,

for the most part, the Psalmist's philosophy of life. For those who now delight in their pages no such burning and immediate hope illumines the tragedies of life, for across it the Teacher who bore witness to the truth, alike when it was sweet and bitter, has thrown the shadow of the Cross. Doubtless there is another side to all this. Many of the Psalmists bear witness to an omnipresent Creator from whom no man can escape, even by the expedient of death; who "reigneth over the heathen," who abides with the contrite, and "doth defend the earth, as it were with a shield." Out of this idea of eternity and omnipresence springs, no doubt, a suggestion that death is not the end; and if it is but a suggestion, it is one of infinite import. Again, in some of the Psalms we realise that the writer had had a glimpse of a success which is not to be measured by any earthly rule. He tells of those "who going through the vale of misery use it for a well: and the pools are filled with water." Such valiant souls are not, he sees, broken down, and do not "turn their hand to wickedness," as he fears that those who suffer severity innocently may do. On the contrary, they are miraculously supported. They "go from

strength to strength: and unto the God of gods appeareth every one of them in Sion." But evidently he regards such instances as out of the common, and accepts their existence as an exceptional comment upon the ordinary laws of experience. The truth is that several systems of thought run parallel to each other through the Psalter. Perhaps the very different dates at which the various Psalms were written may have something to say to this fact; but, whatever explanation scholars may have to offer of their divergent teachings, the ordinary world does not appear to have sought to reconcile them, or even to have remarked the contradiction. It has been content to think of the whole collection as the Psalms of David, and has found in the God of the combatant and the God of the contrite, conceptions which alike satisfy it in its changing moods.

If this great school of poets could come back, they would see that the face of the earth has changed since their day. Their race exists, indeed, but no man sits in David's seat. The greater number are "poor and in misery"; the few have inclined their hearts to covetousness. The lot they desired for their enemies has happened to themselves.

They have been made to flee "as the dust before the wind: and the angel of the Lord scattering them." Yet their songs still delight their persecutors. The Lord's song is still sung in a strange land. It is familiar to the lips of alien children whom they in their patriotic fury would have dashed against the stones. Would they see the reason of these things? Can we see it? The power of the Psalms over the human heart rests on something fundamental,—on the bed-rock of the human consciousness, which remains undisturbed amidst the vicissitudes of creeds and the God-guided developments of the moral idea. The Psalmists sing of the soul of man setting out upon that great quest wherein he is still engaged. They tell of the divine intuition which is still a lantern unto his feet and a light unto his path, by which he is goaded to "seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face evermore." They describe, as they have never been described since, his agony and his joy upon the road; how he loses the track, and cries: "Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters: and thy footsteps are not known"; how he is bowed down by penitence and paralysed by dread; how he is made to possess

the sins of his youth, and how the "fear of death gat hold upon" him. Sometimes we hardly understand their words; they speak as music speaks,—to the emotions rather than the mind. Their songs to most hearers are inextricably bound up with melody. They still show their "dark speech upon the harp." The soul of man, they say, is athirst for the living God. Yet with Him he is a stranger and a sojourner, as were all his fathers; because of that he is desolate and in misery, the sorrows of his heart are enlarged. "Why standest thou so far off, O Lord: and hidest thy face in the needful time of trouble?" he cries. "O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before thee: according to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die."

But the way is not always sorrowful. The singer leads his hero from the depth of despair to the height of delight with a suddenness which has no parallel but in music. "God is my King of old: the help that is done upon earth he doeth it himself," he exults. "Our soul is escaped even as a bird out of the snare of the fowler: the snare is broken, and we are delivered." The floods,

the fields, the hills, the valleys, the fruitful trees, and the cedars, Nature and Art, the whole creation, from the multitude of the stars to the smallest creature which breathes, are made to praise God by these inimitable poets. "Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord: at the presence of the God of Jacob," they commanded, and a world which has criticised their morals and their theology has never ceased to feel the thrill of their works. The electricity of genius is not to be wholly accounted for. The devout reader still stands in awe. Their "lightnings gave shine unto the world; the earth saw it, and was afraid."

2—(2450)

CHAPTER II

VOX CLAMANTIS !

THE praise of Christ and the verdict of Christendom entitle John the Baptist to a high place among the prophets. We know very little of the herald of the new era,—a few fragments of sermons, a few tragic facts, a few comments made by Christ, and that is all. He made a vivid impression upon his own generation, and found a place in contemporary history where our Lord may be said to have none. Yet Christ now leads the ruling races towards a far-off ideal governing, consciously or unconsciously, every good man whom those races produce ; while John has become little more than a tragic figure in a narrative whose interest centres on another,—a figure whose glory diminishes as Religion extricates herself more and more from the mediæval fetters of art and legend, and as tradition fades away in the scientific light of new historical methods. " He must increase, but I must decrease," said the prophet, who recognised his own genius, but was content to sacrifice it on the altar of Him

who he realised, in a short-lived moment of insight, was destined to redeem the world.

John must have been a striking figure as he stood in the wilderness clothed in camel's hair, with a leathern girdle about his loins. We can but imagine that he had an ascetic, perhaps even a fanatical, face ; for his abstinence made a deep impression upon the Evangelists, and men said of him, " He hath a devil." Judging even by the disjointed sentences which have come down to us, his sermons in the wilderness were deeply impressive. His hearers were conscience-stricken, and Roman soldiery, Roman officials, and unctuous Pharisees did not wear their hearts upon their sleeves for wandering preachers to peck at. Herod—the Romanised Jew—" heard him gladly," and " feared John, knowing that he was a just man." The moral force which could command fear in a tyrant who had power to order the preacher's head to be brought to him on a dish in execution of a jesting vow must have been considerable. John was a preacher of self-denial, and in accordance with this theory he deliberately denied himself those mental delights which most great preachers allow themselves to enjoy. He did not exact from his followers

even the most modified form of hero worship. He desired no personal attachment. His one thought was to prepare for a reformation, to make straight in the desert a highway for the Lord. He denied that he was a reincarnation of a former prophet. He denied passionately that he was the Messiah. He refused to claim for his rite of baptism any miraculous significance. It was a symbol of repentance, and could not endue the Spirit of God. He struggled to turn men's minds away from himself, that they might think of the coming Messiah, who should rule in righteousness over an earthly kingdom, who would purge a corrupt society, and from whom the sin-convicted men around him had everything to fear; "whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into his garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." This Messiah was, he declared, among them, one whose shoes he was unworthy to unloose. "Behold," he cried, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Little as he desired the gift, John certainly possessed great personal magnetism. How else could he have got men to stand and hear

his denunciations ? He told the men of his generation that they were as fierce and false as serpents, a " generation of vipers." He accused the soldiers of violence and calumny, and the tax-gatherers of extortion, the Pharisees of an effete pride of race, the comfortable class generally of a pitiless greed. " Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages," he commands. " Exact no more than that which is appointed you." " Begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father : for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." " He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none ; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." That John made a harsh impression on his followers there is no doubt ; not one gentle or sympathetic word is remembered of him ; yet thousands flocked to hear his preaching, " and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins."

The last scene in the prophet's life is exceedingly sad. He is in prison and in doubt. Evidently the son of the desert pined in confinement, and we can imagine that he sometimes wondered if he had not misapprehended

his duty, and made himself useless by a mere indiscretion. Could it be justifiable, he must have asked himself, that a man preordained to a stupendous work should sacrifice his liberty in order to reprove a profligate? To be in prison for *lèse-majesté!* and he a man who dreamed of preparing the people for a new revelation of God! It was a desperate lot indeed. The irony of fate must have struck him bitterly at times. He heard nothing of the political plans of the new Messiah. So far as he could make out, the man in whose mission he had believed was going about teaching and healing among the crowd. With a touching belief in the character of Him in whose destiny he had ceased to have faith, he sent a Disciple to Him saying: "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" No direct answer was made to the question, for none was possible. Christ was indeed He that should come, but not He for whom John looked, not the ruler who would lay the axe to the root of the trees, would purge the government and punish the oppressor, but a teacher who healed, cleansed, revived, and told the good news. It is surely not too fanciful to imagine that the Disciples were indignant at John's want of faith. Our

Lord's testimony to his greatness comes immediately after the departure of the messengers, and reads like a vindication. "What went ye out into the wilderness to see?" He asks. "A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. . . . Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." We do not suppose for a moment that our Lord intended in these sentences to appraise the great men of all history, and set John in the front rank; or that He made any suggestion as to his chances of happiness in the next world. The common-sense interpretation of the passage is that He spoke as who should say in the present day of some great friend: "A juster or more magnanimous man was never born, but many smaller men are more spiritually minded." John was among "the violent" who would take the kingdom of heaven "by force," and all the while it is "within," and "cometh

not with observation." It was a tragic but an inevitable mistake.

John passes from the Evangelists' pages in a characteristic manner. The little body of men who were so soon to turn the world upside down, to make a straight path for whose doctrine the Baptist had given his life, had small leisure to mourn his departure. When the news of his murder came, our Lord said to the Disciples: "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had not leisure so much as to eat"; but "the people saw them departing," and Christ "was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd," and, foregoing his privacy, "he began to teach them many things." What the many things were Mark does not tell us; his mind is occupied with an approaching miracle. Perhaps Christ spoke of the great spirit who had just passed away burdened with misapprehension; perhaps He denounced "that fox" who had robbed the world of so great a man. Once more the Disciples endeavoured to get out of the press. "The time is far passed: send them away," they begged; but he would not let them go away hungry,

and on the day of John's death a more primitive Church than that of Paul was occupied in " serving tables." When they were fed, our Lord, seeing, perhaps, that the Disciples were worn out, " constrained " them to get into a ship while he sent the multitude to their homes ; and afterwards He, free at last, went on to a mountain to pray. From the high ground He perceived the Disciples " toiling in rowing," and again foregoing His prayers, He went to their help. Thus in the work of the world a prophet who desired no personal recognition was fitly forgotten.

CHAPTER III

THE MIND OF ST. PETER

ALL through the ages Peter has touched the heart of Christendom because he was, as people say, "so human," which means so much like most of us. He acted in terrible circumstances as the majority of us shrewdly suspect that we should have acted in like case. He repented, as we imagine that we also should repent; and he atoned heroically for his cowardice, as we all dimly hope that we might possibly atone. The story of his life is one of the great Christian credentials setting forth the power of Christianity to recreate character. Peter attained through faith to the quality of courage—a quality which seems at first sight to be an unattainable gift—and the average man admires and desires courage with all his heart. To our mind, it is a greater evidence of the power of Christianity that Peter should have died a martyr than that the fierce inquisitor Saul should have become the St. Paul of the charity chapter. That fierce zeal should be so restrained as to

become benevolent enthusiasm is not unthinkable; but to make a hero of a coward is a different matter, and seems, indeed, to necessitate a spiritual rebirth. Certainly Peter as Luke paints him in Acts is a man with whom we cannot connect cowardice; and his Epistle to the persecuted strangers in Pontus is one of the most wonderfully "heartening" writings in the New Testament, and must have carried immense weight, coming as it did from one who had felt and had yielded to the temptation to shirk, and instantly "turned again."

According to the New Testament narrative, Peter was begotten again unto a lively hope by the incident of the Resurrection. So far as we are told, our Lord did not allude to Peter's denial when he appeared to the fishermen upon the shores of the lake. He commended to him the care of the community, and He said something to him "signifying by what death he should glorify God." At first reading, this suggestion that he would die a martyr seems a harsh one, but it was probably the only thing which could have restored Peter's self-respect. By these words he was reassured of his own potential heroism. For the fears of a good man are not allayed

when he has saved his skin, nor his inner sense of shame wiped out by repentance. The more keenly a man repents cowardice the more terribly is it borne in upon him that he may do the same thing again. Peter had protested that he was ready to die, and having refused to do so, he has done with protestations. "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love Thee," is all that he will say. Christ makes the protestation for him. He will be ready, He assures him, to die any death, and the last terror is lifted from the soul of the man who, tradition tells us, voluntarily increased the sufferings of his own crucifixion. There are, and always have been, a very large number of men who could face almost any danger if they could but be certain that they would face it creditably. The fear of fear is an awful fear, for the man who feels it thinks he will forfeit the favour of God and man. That Peter should have felt such fear must endear him to the ordinary man who so often feels it.

Apart from conduct, Peter's mental standpoint is wonderfully like that of the average religious man. He clings rather unreasonably to the ideals and ceremonials among which he was brought up, and he is apt to fall back

into them, even after he has assented to newer ways. His feeling is for things as they are. He does not desire to overturn existing systems either of thought or of government. He has a deep respect for the existing order, and can hardly dissociate a religious attitude of mind from one of willing subordination to the powers that be. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. . . . . Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." What is this but a wonderfully heightened and sanctified version of the civil, political, and religious creed of the ordinary man? Besides this, St. Peter shows a great appreciation of what we call respectability, a quality, or rather a set of qualities, at which it is just now the fashion among some un-English Englishmen to laugh. He tells his readers not to be careless of appearances,—"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." The

outward harmony of family life seems to him a matter of great importance. His advice to husbands and wives is too well known to quote. That it commends itself instinctively to ordinary men is proved by the fact that it still retains its place in the Marriage Service. He makes much of gentle, " pitiful " manners, and even suggests the seemliness of inconspicuous dress, while he exhorts to ungrudging hospitality. Servants, he declares, are not at liberty to disobey their masters, even if these are unjust. Christ, he tells them, suffered unjustly, and they may count such sufferings as in some sense an honour. All the same, he lays it down as an absolute principle that all men are equal before God, " who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work." He is inclined to believe that right-doing, generally speaking, obtains a temporal as well as a spiritual reward, and he does not hesitate to make that reward an inducement to do well, quoting with conviction the words of the Psalmist: " For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it." He holds

that practice is, after all, the most effectual method of preaching, and exhorts his readers with "well doing" to "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." That he and St. Paul were not always in accord is evident from the New Testament, and tradition has somewhat accentuated their differences. The spiritually simple and the intellectually spiritual will never be altogether in sympathy.

For the spiritual architecture of the Church of Christ we are indebted to the Apostle of the Gentiles; and every great teacher of genius whom the Church has produced has added something to its splendour; but it is on simpler men that the edifice is founded, and it is they who have preserved its unity. For the Church is in some sense one, though the sects suspect one another, and the great Roman branch repudiates all recalcitrant children. Men who have one ideal and one hope cannot be altogether divided. For this unity, such as it is, Christendom has to thank, not her men of genius, but her "plain men." There are Evangelicals, in the true sense of the word, in all the Churches who perceive the figure of Christ behind the paraphernalia of all the systems, and who unconsciously reject, because they do not understand, the

contradictory commandments of men. The men of religious genius build up, defend, and, alas! at times rend, the Church. It is the men of the type of Peter who preserve the faith, so far as it is preserved, "in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life."

CHAPTER IV

TERTULLIAN AND THE PLAIN MAN

CHRISTIANS of to-day have a faith in common with those of yesterday, and with those of a thousand years ago; in fact, they have a faith in common with the Apostles. But while we still profess and call ourselves Christians, it is most likely that we should not offer to an inquirer the same proofs of the truth of our religion as an equally good Christian would have offered two or three hundred years ago. His proofs, again, might easily differ from those which satisfied his ancestors. Mediæval science is meaningless to us; and as to mediæval metaphysics, we have not the patience to read them. If we look back to the early Church, the Fathers are now little read; and if we turn to a time immediately behind our own, no one would now quote Paley in order to confound a sceptic. Old "evidences" are rejected, and new ones accepted from age to age,—so true is it that while knowledge vanishes away, faith abides. It is impossible but that this reflection should suggest to the man who thinks about theology at all that

3—(2450)

there is some evidence for the truth of Christianity which is not subject to the destruction of time, and which has upheld it during those transition periods when threadbare sanctions for its credibility were being called in question and new ones were not yet conceived. As we look back across the ages, it seems as though the witness of the Spirit were able alone to sustain from within that which men have exhausted their moral strength for ages in endeavouring to prop up from without.

Some such thoughts as these must have crossed the mind of Tertullian when, hot controversialist as he was, he paused in the midst of his theological dialectics to appeal to a new witness. "I call in a new testimony," he writes in his treatise called "De Testimonio Animæ," "yea, one which is better known than all literature, more discussed than all doctrine, more public than all publications, greater than the whole man —I mean all which is man's. Stand forth, O soul . . . . . whether thou art received from heaven, or sprung up from earth; whether thou art formed of numbers, or of atoms; whether thine existence begins with that of the body, or thou art put into it at a later stage; from whatever source, and in

whatever way, thou makest man a rational being, in the highest degree capable of thought and knowledge,—stand forth and give thy witness." It is the soul of the plain man that Tertullian would question. "I call thee not," he goes on, "as when, fashioned in schools, trained in libraries, fed up in Attic academies and porticoes, thou belchest forth thy wisdom. I address thee, simple and rude, and uncultured and untaught, such as they have thee who have thee only, that very thing pure and entire, of the road, the street, the workshop. I want thine inexperience, since in thy small experience no one feels any confidence. I demand of thee the things thou bringest with thee into man, which thou knowest either from thyself, or from thine author, whoever he may be. Thou art not, as I well know, Christian; for a man becomes a Christian, he is not born one. Yet Christians earnestly press thee for a testimony; they press thee, though an alien, to bear witness against thy friends, that they may be put to shame before thee, for hating and mocking us on account of things which convict thee as an accessory." Christians, he says, writing about the year 200, give offence by proclaiming that there is one God who is Lord of the

whole universe. Yet at the back of the popular mythology this idea, he maintains, stands firm. "Bear thy testimony, if thou knowest this to be truth; for openly and with a perfect liberty, such as we do not possess, we hear thee both in private and in public exclaim: 'Which may God grant,' and 'If God so will.' By expressions such as these thou declarest that there is One who is distinctively God, and thou confessest that all power belongs to him to whose will as Sovereign thou dost look." Nor, he continues, is "the nature of the God we declare unknown to thee: 'God is good, God does good,' thou are wont to say." Again, he goes on: "As among us, as belonging to the God of benignity and goodness, 'Blessing' is a most sacred thing in our religion and our life, thou too sayest as readily as a Christian needs, 'God bless thee.'" Christians are mocked, he says, for maintaining that men exist after their death. Yet "the man in the street" exclaims "Poor man" of one who is dead, and in a different mood declares that when celebrating the feast of the dead he has a sense of the presence of his friend. Further and further he pushes this argument. Does the ordinary man really believe in annihilation? He thinks

not. "How happens it that thou cursest, as one capable of suffering from that curse, the man whose memory comes back on thee with the sting in it of some old injury?" In like manner, also, how is it that, "in thy kindly feeling to him to whom thou art indebted for favours, thou entreatest repose to his bones and ashes"? Among the learned heathen there are those who acknowledge the one true God, he admits, but they "hold withal that He is neither Searcher, nor Ruler, nor Judge." They believe that they are "honouring God in freeing Him from the cares of keeping watch, and the trouble of taking note." Yet these very philosophers, "elsewhere, confessing that the soul is divine, and bestowed on us by God, stumble against a testimony of the soul itself." Conscience declares to them that God is a righteous judge. "So thou art always ready, O soul, from thine own knowledge, nobody casting scorn upon thee, and no one preventing, to exclaim, 'God sees all,' and 'I commend thee to God,' and 'May God repay,' and 'God shall judge between us.'" Then, in a burst of apologetic eloquence hardly surpassed by Paul on Mars Hill, he declares that behind all the myths and ceremonies of paganism is to be found the

dim vision of the Christian's God. "How is it that, even with the garland of Ceres on thy brow, wrapped in the purple cloak of Saturn, wearing the white robe of the goddess Isis, thou invokest God as judge? Standing under the statue of Æsculapius, adorning the brazen image of Juno, arraying the helmet of Minerva with dusky figures, thou never thinkest of appealing to any of these deities. In thine own forum thou appealest to a God who is elsewhere." With the fire of a Hebrew prophet he proclaims the eternal unity and the everlasting desire of the soul to find rest in God. "Though under the oppressive bondage of the body, though led astray by depraving customs, though enervated by lusts and passions, though in slavery to false gods; yet, whenever the soul comes to itself, as out of a surfeit, or a sleep, or a sickness, and attains something of its natural soundness it speaks of God." "These testimonies of the soul are simple as true, commonplace as simple, universal as commonplace, natural as universal, divine as natural." In the heart of man and in the operations of Nature Tertullian sees ever-new evidence of his own faith. "The condition of all things is renewal," he writes. "All things when they

have departed return to their first condition, all things begin when they have ceased, they are ended that they may be born. Therefore the whole revolving wheel of existence bears witness to the resurrection of the dead." Had he ever heard the sentence so early attributed to Christ: "Raise the stone, and thou shalt find me; cleave the wood, and there am I"? It is not impossible.

"How astonishingly modern all this is!" the reader is constrained to exclaim. Certainly the witness of the soul does not become old-fashioned. Tertullian himself is a witness to this fact when he writes from his heart and his experience of those essential things which Christ taught,—of the relation of the soul to God, of man to man, of prayer, and of conduct. His words still live, but his polemics and his theological dissertations, his tirades against heresy, both before and after he became a Montanist, have turned to ashes. The modern man is weary to read them. Yet this paragraph upon prayer might well have been written yesterday. "Old-world prayer, indeed, used to free men from fires, and from beasts, and from famine; and yet it had not then received its form from Christ. But how far more amply operative is *Christian*

prayer! It does not station the angel of dew in mid-fires, nor muzzle lions . . . . . it has no delegated grace to avert any sense of suffering; but it supplies the suffering, and the feeling, and the grieving, with endurance: it amplifies grace by virtue, that faith may know what she obtains from the Lord, understanding what—for God's name's sake—she suffers. . . . . Likewise it washes away faults, repels temptations, extinguishes persecutions, consoles the faint-spirited, cheers the high-spirited, escorts travellers, appeases waves, makes robbers stand aghast, nourishes the poor, governs the rich, upraises the fallen, arrests the falling, confirms the standing."

From day to day religious people rely more and more upon the witness of the soul. It is not that any reaction in favour of obscurantism has taken place, neither is there any wide-spread return to the anæsthetic of authority. All thoughtful people believe in their right to test all things, and commend the energy of the historic and scientific professors who work hard that they may state fairly all questions of probability in relation to the Christian religion. Nevertheless, these men, we cannot but reflect, give us neither the certainty which comes of demonstration, nor

the reassurance which faith only can supply. When St. Paul said " the world by wisdom knew not God," he put philosophically the instinctive conclusion of the ordinary man; and when Tertullian declared " where there are three, even be they laymen, there is the Church," he expressed the secret belief of most men who are not priests. But Christianity still slakes the spiritual thirst of the Western world, and Christ still offers water from the well of life. The ordinary man will not ask, either in the study or the sanctuary, whether or no he may drink :—

> " Let reason then at her own quarry fly,
> For how can finite gauge infinity ? "

CHAPTER V

SAYINGS OF CHRIST

"THE Church has four Gospels, heresies very many," wrote Origen. By the end of the second century the position of the Synoptists and of St. John was established as authoritative, and, judging by such Apocryphal Gospels as we still possess, the decision of the Church in favour of these four was not only wise, but inevitable. Nevertheless, the early Fathers quote many pregnant sentences as sayings of our Lord which belong either to extra-Canonical Gospels or to an oral tradition. Papias, writing probably about 140, says that he had made a collection of those words of the Lord which had been handed down from mouth to mouth, and adds that, for his own part, he thinks more of the "living and abiding voice" than of books.

The loss of such a collection was indeed calamitous; but possibly parts of it survive scattered up and down the pages of early patristic literature. Of recent times a great deal of importance has been given to these supposed sayings. They have been brought

together by the learned, and many critical books have been written, especially in Germany, about them. The finding of the Oxyrhynchus Logia by Messrs. Grenfell and Hunt in 1897, and another discovery of Logia made also in Oxyrhynchus in 1903, directed the attention of the reading public to the subject. Unfortunately, the scholars could offer them no definite conclusions. What one accepts another rejects. There is, of course, a great general likelihood that the whole of the true tradition was not enclosed between the four walls of the Canonical Gospels, but of particular evidence there is little enough. The ordinary man has no criterion by which to judge these wonderful fragments but the inadequate one of his own common-sense.

Professor Bernhard Pick, D.D., has just published a little book of extraordinary interest, and one which is evidently the fruit of extraordinary labour ("Paralipomena"; Kegan Paul, Trench, and Co., 3s. 6d. net). In it he has collected more of the extra-Canonical "sayings" than have ever before been brought together in English. He gives full bibliographical references to each, and leaves it to the reader to judge of its worth,

throwing out to him, however, as a guide the following wise and guarded suggestion: "When we meet in the extra-Canonical Gospels with traits which are homogeneous to the Christ-picture of the Gospels, let us not disregard them, but rather look upon them, though cautiously, as an enrichment of the same." He might have added a warning as to the great danger we are all in of seizing upon passages calculated to fill up the obvious lacunæ of the Gospel, which may well have been invented for that very purpose. But enough of caution. The fragments here brought together are in many cases so intrinsically true and beautiful as to be well worth our study though their authenticity be at best but hypothetical.

Let us take first Professor Swete's version of a passage from a collection of Logia found at Oxyrhynchus in 1903. We omit the opening lines, as their meaning is to us utterly obscure :—" The kingdom of heaven is within you, and whosoever shall know himself shall find it ; for if ye shall truly know yourselves, ye are the sons and daughters of the Father Almighty, and ye shall know yourselves to be in the city of God, and ye are the city." The phrase, "truly know yourselves," recalls

the words in which the conversion of the prodigal son is described in the parable: "When he came to himself, he said . . . . . I will arise and go to my Father." The reference to the city of God brings to mind the city "set on a hill" of the Sermon on the Mount, and the application to let our light shine before men. Yet it is not so terse and not so distinctly in the manner of our Lord as is the following injunction taken from St. Matthew's Gospel (Codex C, Palestinian Syriac Library): "And I say unto you, that men must give an account of every good word which they shall not speak." This is, of course, an enlargement, either made by Christ or added by an Evangelist, of the sentence about idle words. In the same way we find in the Fathers that the duty of mercy is pushed home by various slight additions to the received text.

The subject of mercy brings us to one of the longest and most striking passages set down by Professor Pick. It occurs in a Coptic fragment translated and published in 1903 by Professor Julius Böhmer: "It happened that the Lord went forth from the city and walked with His disciples over the mountains. And they came to a mountain, and the road

which led to it was steep. There they found a man with a sumpter-mule. But the animal had fallen, for the burden was too heavy, and he beat it, that it bled. And Jesus came to him and said: 'Man, why dost thou beat thy animal? Seest thou not, that it is too weak for its burden, and knowest thou not that it suffers pain?' But the man answered and said: 'What is that to you? I can beat it as much as I please, since it is my property, and I bought it for a good sum of money. Ask those who are with Thee, for they know me and know thereof.' And some of the disciples said: 'Yea, Lord, it is as he says. We have seen how he bought it.' But the Lord said: 'Do you not notice how it bleeds, and hear you not, how it laments and cries?' But they answered and said: 'Nay, Lord, we hear not that it laments and cries.' And the Lord was sad and exclaimed: 'Woe to you, that ye hear not how it complains to the creator in heaven and cries for mercy. But three times woes to him, of whom it complains and cries in its distress.' And He came forth and touched the animal. And it arose and its wounds were healed. And Jesus said to the man: 'Now, go on and beat it no more, that you also may find

mercy.'" Sympathy with the sufferings of animals finds few expressions in the New Testament. "Doth God take care for oxen?" St. Paul scornfully asked. But whatever view we may take of the personality of our Lord, it is certain that His mind is not to be measured by the mind of His age. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father," is a Canonical saying of which the authenticity is unquestioned. It puts St. Paul in the wrong, and from the point of view of homogeneity lends colour to the beautiful incident we have quoted.

"They who are with me have not understood me" (quoted from the "Acta Petri"), is a sentence certainly not out of harmony with the Canonical Gospel narrative, where the naïve literalness of the Disciples is continually pointed out. Our Lord is represented to us in the Synoptic Gospels as recognising and understanding good men rather than as being recognised or understood by them. As a pendant to this "saying," we would quote one to which the German scholar Ropes calls especial attention, declaring it worthy of a place in the received Gospels: "The Lord knoweth them that are His, both

those that are near and those that are far off." Another sentence found in the "Codex Askew," and not put into the mouth of Christ, but into that of a Disciple, bears upon the same subject: "The disciples thus spake unto Jesus: 'Thou art a key to every man, and the one who shutteth to every man.'" This is a strange and very interesting comment upon the teaching of Christianity, whoever said it. That Christ offered the key of knowledge to all those who lived shut up within the confines of legal and ceremonial superstition is evident. But it is also true that Christianity shuts some doors. In the eyes of the old Roman world it must have seemed to shut many more than it opened. Even now we are not quite sure how many ways of life it proscribes. Its very insistence upon reciprocity is a constantly tightening curb upon man's self-will and passion for self-development. It is this restrictive aspect of Christianity which Nietzsche hates when he upholds the ideal of the "superman" who is to consider himself at all costs, and deprecates that "moralic acid" with which, in his opinion, Christianity has poisoned the Western world.

We will quote only a few more short passages, and then leave our readers to examine

for themselves this most fascinating anthology of Logia. "I am with him who is alone" (Ephræm Syrus) and "Be never glad unless ye are in charity with your brother" (Hieronymus) are surely sayings worthy to be ascribed to Christ; none but the learned have the right to an opinion as to any other evidence of their authenticity. "The weak shall be saved through the strong" ("Apostolic Church Ordinances") and "Every man who is not tempted is not approved" (Cassian) are somehow less in character, though wonderfully true to a common experience of life. "Where the pains are, thither hasteneth the physician" (Ephræm Syrus) is beautiful, and so is the following exhortation to that faith which fosters, not dogmatism, but charity: "Take care of faith and hope, through which comes the God-loving and kindly love, which brings life everlasting" (Macarius).

4—(2450)

CHAPTER VI

THE "LATITUDE-MEN"

"I CAN come into no company of late, but I find the chief discourse to be about a certain new sect of men called Latitude-men. . . . . The name of Latitude-men is daily exagitated amongst us both in taverns and pulpits, and very tragical representations made of them." These words, written in 1662, are to be found in a Restoration pamphlet. A "representation" has just been published of the founders of this so-called "sect" ("Seventeenth Century Men of Latitude," by E. A. George, T. Fisher Unwin, 3s. 6d. net), who might better be described as the founders of Anglican Liberalism, for "Liberalism as well as bigotry has its pedigree." Bishop Burnet, in his "History of His Own Time," writes thus of them: "They loved the constitution of the church and the liturgy, and could well live under them: but they did not think it unlawful to live under another form. They wished that things might have been carried with more moderation. And they continued to keep a good correspondence

with those who had differed from them in opinion, and allowed a great freedom both in philosophy and in divinity: from whence they were called men of latitude. And upon this, men of narrower thoughts and fiercer tempers fastened upon them the name of Latitudinarians." Mr. George gives us an account of the lives and work of eight of these Latitudinarians,—eight sketches quite admirably conceived. Among them we find the great names of Jeremy Taylor, Baxter, and Sir Thomas Browne; but perhaps the most interesting chapters to the general reader will be those which deal with the less-known names of Hales, Chillingworth, and Whichcote, partly because in these cases the material is fresher, and partly because, while men of less genius, they were more strikingly modern in turn of mind. Hales and Whichcote might both be described as dons, the one being a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, the other Provost of King's College, Cambridge. Both breathed "the still air of delightful studies," and neither was forced into partisanship by the active life of the time. It is true that towards the end of his life Hales, like his friend Chillingworth, who made one of the same learned Oxford society, and died a

prisoner of Cromwell's army, suffered persecution for his loyalty to the King and the Church; but their loyalty was never bigotry. Whichcote, whom Cromwell protected, used his whole influence in favour of the loyalists, for neither persecution nor prosperity could take from these men, either politically or religiously, the right to see both sides.

On his death-bed Chillingworth was heckled by a Puritan extremist, one Francis Cheynell, who suspected him of a heterodox universalism, and, with a comical determination to damn some one, begged him at least to admit that a Turk, a Papist, or a Socinian could not be saved. This Chillingworth refused to do, and wearily "besought an interest in the charity of his disputant," for, said he, "I was ever a charitable man." "My answer," writes Cheynell, who recorded the interview, "was somewhat tart, and therefore more charitable, considering his [spiritual] condition." He "rebuked" the dying man "sharply." But even this strange unkindness could not prejudice Chillingworth's inherent justice of mind. They began to speak of politics, and Chillingworth said: "Sir, I must acknowledge that I do verily believe that the intentions of the Parliament are

better than the intentions of the Court or of that army which I have followed: but I conceive that the Parliament takes a wrong course to prosecute and accomplish their good intentions, for war is not the way of Jesus Christ." The determination of these "men of latitude" to read the Gospels in their plain sense, forgetting the glosses of ecclesiastical or utilitarian worldliness, had brought them all to the conclusion to which Hales gave expression. "Christ's kingdom is maintained," he says, "not by the sword but by the Spirit: not by violence but by love: not by striving but by yielding: not by fighting but by dying."

It throws a curious light upon the character of Laud that he not only protected, but preferred, both Hales and Chillingworth, making the one a Canon of Windsor and the other Chancellor of Salisbury. Hales did not really wish for the canonry, but Laud over-persuaded him, and that after an interview in which the Archbishop "sifted and ferreted him about from one hole to another, in certain matters of religion." Neither seems to have made any secret of his opinions. Hales, though he disliked the publicity of the Press, was a very open talker, and Chillingworth

would only sign the Articles upon the understanding that his signature meant nothing but his general approval of the doctrines of the Church of England, for, said he, " upon the whole, I acknowledge their doctrine, or at least I have no wish to dispute it. I accept the Articles as articles of peace."

All the " men of latitude " took their stand upon the Scriptures. Like Jeremy Taylor, they believed the Christianity " therein set down," and were inclined to deprecate all more particular subscription ; and they would not be bound by scholastic definitions or bow to " church authority," which, said Hales, " is none," or the authority of " tradition, which for the most part is feigned." Settlements of doctrine made by Synods and ecclesiastical shows of hands had no influence over their minds. The minority might, after all, be right, for " it will never go so well with mankind that the most shall be the best,"—a very undemocratic sentiment to find in a mind so prophetically modern. They foresaw, however, that many Protestants in their fatal slavery to the letter of the Bible would only exchange one bondage for another. Revelation through books is, after all, Hales maintains, a secondary form of inspiration.

Though he believed that God spoke directly to the inspired writers, he dreaded lest Protestantism should become the worship of a Book. "It would be better," we read, "if we had no need of writing, no other teacher but the Spirit, no other books but our hearts." Would you know, he asks, "where to find the kingdom of Christ? Our Saviour directs you in the Gospel. The kingdom of heaven, saith he, cometh not by observation, neither shall ye say, Lo here, or Lo there, for the kingdom of heaven is within you. Let every man therefore retire into himself, and see if he can find this kingdom in his heart; for if he find it not there, in vain shall he find it in all the world besides."

The authority of reason and of conscience was greatly exalted by all the "men of latitude," and Hales regards the search for an outward infallible guide as in many cases a refusal to accept its stern ruling. "For, beloved, infallibility is not a favour impropriated to any one man, it is a duty alike expected at the hands of all, all must have it. . . . . There is no other means not to be deceived, but to know things yourselves. . . . . Wherefore hath God given me the light of reason and conscience, if I must suffer

myself to be led and governed by the reason and conscience of another man?" Whichcote declared that "there is nothing in the world hath more of God in it than man hath," and spoke of conscience as the "Home-God." Yet they all admit that "the comprehension of spiritual truth" requires "a certain principle more noble and inward than reason itself, and without which reason will falter, or at least reach but to mean and frivolous things." This "principle" is of so abstruse a nature that Henry More—another of the "men of latitude" introduced to us by Mr. George—knew not what to call it but a "divine sagacity." All the philosophers, he says, call reason the oracle of God, "but they do not consider that the oracle of God is not to be heard but in his holy temple, that is to say, in a good and holy man, thoroughly sanctified in spirit, soul and body." All the same, with Jeremy Taylor at their head, they all refused to condemn any man on the score of his opinions. "Give a fair allowance of patience to those who mean well," Whichcote pleads. "Nothing is desperate in the condition of good men; they will not live and die in any dangerous error. They have a right principle within them, and God's superintendency,

conduct, and guidance." For them, he is convinced, be the clouds never so thick, "the day will clear up" at last. The revelation of Christ is a revelation to which he believes the human spirit itself bears witness. "No sooner doth the truth of God come into the soul's sight, but the soul knows her to be her first and old acquaintance; which though they have been by some accident unhappily parted a great while, yet having now through the divine providence happily met, they greet one another and renew acquaintance as those that were first and ancient friends."

Perhaps these are not the kind of men by whom the ordinary world is ever consciously swayed. They founded no church and no sect, but they enlarged the borders of the Church in which they were born. Declaring that for heresy to be sinful it must be wilful, for a good motive is in the sight of God a justification, they built within the precincts of the Church of England a city of refuge,—a city which, unchartered and unnamed, has remained unto this day, and sheltered many of those of whom the Church may be most proud. From time to time certain fanatics have attempted to pull it down and "ferret" out the inhabitants, but hitherto the Church

of the nation has tacitly protected her freedom-loving sons. These are more in number than they used to be, and it is doubtful now whether the Church could survive their loss. They may some day prove to be numerically the strongest party in the Church. If this should ever happen, they will do well to recollect that those who demand toleration must give it. Let them take the advice of their spiritual fathers, and "not be over-industrious in discovering the weakness of such arguments as are meant for the engendering in men's minds the belief of that truth, which is of so necessary and vast importance for mankind to be persuaded of." Religion may be sacrificed to all kinds of theology, —as well to the Latitudinarian as to the orthodox.

CHAPTER VII

THE APOCALYPSE

DANTE'S "Divine Comedy" is susceptible of no literal interpretation. It is not history nor theology, though it is saturated with both; it is poetry. A like criticism might be made upon the Book of Revelation. The writer was not a theologian nor an historian, but a prophet. He was "in the Spirit," he tells us, when he conceived his book, and he spoke not of what he saw, but as the Spirit gave him utterance. To regard him as a sort of supernatural traveller who has been not only to Rome, but to heaven and to hell, and who described for his reader the seven hills, the golden street, the burning lake, Nero, Satan, and the King of heaven, is to use the deadly weapon of literalism to kill the spirit of prophecy, and to make of the prophet not a seer but an impostor. "No man hath seen God at any time," declared St. John. There is no such thing as going up to heaven nor down to hell in search of the Words of God, argued St. Paul, for "the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart." "The kingdom

of God is within you," said Christ, who spake "as one having authority"; and surely no Christian scribe would have consciously contradicted Him.

The scene of the Revelation, like the scene of "The Divine Comedy," is laid in the human soul environed by the spirit of the time. The second could only have been written by an Italian in the Middle Ages, the first only by a Jew in the dawn of the Christian era. The writer is a believer in Christ and the literary descendant of the Prophet Daniel. We cannot altogether reconstruct the mediæval world in which Dante lived. Learned men indicate for us the colouring and outline, but only here and there can we distinguish detail. The meaning of much of the poem is therefore dubious. What is true in this respect of Dante's poetry is true in a greater degree of the prophet's "Revelation." Part of it is, as Luther said, entirely "dark." In the chiaroscuro, however, beautiful and awful forms are still to be seen. The writer breathes an atmosphere of persecution. The smoke of the sacrifice is ever in his nostrils, the cries of the innocent are never out of his ears. The thought of suffering is stamped indelibly upon his imagination. The human instinct

to transfer it to guilty shoulders is strong in his heart. Surely, he feels, there must be justice somewhere, an abyss of fire, and a second death. Surely the proud heathen "speaking great things and blasphemies" will expiate somehow the blood of those who endured to the end and died "for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God," and whose only offence was that they would not worship "the beast, neither his image." Surely, too, the souls of those whose bodies lie beneath the Christian altar will be hereafter received into an abiding city,—not a city like Rome with her slaves and her oppressors, her irksome law, her unbounded licence, her religious ritual and her fleshly rites, her schools, her armies, and her amphitheatre, but such a city as Jerusalem of old might prefigure in the mind of the patriot, a New Jerusalem, whose gates shone in the sunset, a city enlightened by the Spirit of God and governed by the precepts of Christ. "I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it"; and "the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

Such is the hope of final justice which welds together the many sections of the Book of the

Revelation. "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints." But the details are blurred, and often defy interpretation. Here and there, as in a damaged mosaic, brilliant fragments remain on which the colours are still fresh. We see "the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God," and are told that "the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." What does it mean? Who can tell us any more? Yet we cannot forget it. Again, we see "a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him." Further on there is another strange rider armed with a bow, who "went forth conquering and to conquer." Then a white-robed company beside a stream, and we are told that "these are they which came out of great tribulation," and are now at peace where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." The whole region is peopled with angels, and vibrates with their voices. There is a sound as "of many waters," and as "of a great thunder." Through it come strains of melody, "harpers harping with their harps." From time to time a single

voice is distinguishable, and a message is to be heard. "I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the honour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

The belief that the Apostle John wrote the Book of the Revelation is now very generally abandoned. From the earliest times, as early as the year 200, we hear of those who doubted its authenticity. For centuries it did not form part of the Greek Canon, and at the time of the Reformation its canonicity was seriously attacked in the West. Luther objected to it, not on historical, but on religious grounds. He "could not see that it was inspired by the Holy Ghost." Our Lord—as He is revealed to us in the rest of Scripture—hardly appeared in the book, he said. Would John have made such an omission? Zwingli condemned it altogether; Calvin left it out of his commentary upon the Bible; but in spite of serious assaults it has not lost its place. The Rev. F. C. Porter, in his long and deeply

interesting article on "Revelation" in Hastings's "Dictionary of the Bible" (the more orthodox, our readers may remember, of the two great Biblical dictionaries), thus explains its continuance in the Canon. There was, and is, he thinks, "a consciousness [in the Church] that on the whole the religious faith and feeling of the book predominate over its Apocalyptic form, and give to Apocalyptical language, which the majority cannot understand or accept, practically the value of figure for the emotional expression of Christian faith and hope."

Christendom would, we think, have been poorer had the Church refused to sanction the vision of this seer—had she refused to listen to this poet's expression of the hopes which the fires of persecution could not consume. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men," he cries, "and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people and God himself shall be with them, and be their God . . . . . and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." At times we see that the sense of his prophetic office was strong upon him. He was constrained to

set down his thoughts; he could not forbear. "Write: for these words are true and faithful," we read. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." It is strange that the English Church, who searched the scriptures to such wonderful purpose when she compiled her Liturgy, made no use of the following invitation from the Book of the Revelation: "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Luther, according to Professor Jülicher, based his trenchant Biblical criticism not so much upon his learning as upon his religious genius; perhaps that is why his arguments are still so cogent. Truly, we cannot recognise our Lord in the Apocalypse. We hear of the symbolic Lamb, we see the leader of the heavenly host; but he who in martial pomp avenges the saints, who judges and makes war in righteousness, is not our Lord, whose agony moved him only to forgiveness. Now and again—for instance, as we read the words, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock"—we do indeed see "one like unto the Son

of man,"—" He himself with His human air." But the next moment, as in Browning's vision of Easter Day, He is gone. Perhaps after all the best reason for the reverence Christendom has paid to the Book of the Revelation may be expressed in its own words: "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." If its author was not a Christian Apostle, he was without doubt a Christian prophet, and there is faith, hope, and passion in his poetry whose explanation and inspiration is Christ.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHRIST OF ENGLISH POETRY

UNDER the title of "The Christ of English Poetry," the Dean of Ely (Dr. C. W. Stubbs) has republished the deeply interesting Hulsean Lectures which he delivered before the University of Cambridge in 1904-5 (J. M. Dent and Co., 6s. net). The field suggested by the title is, of course, larger than could be adequately covered in a single volume; but the Dean has, as he explains in his first chapter, delimited a small portion of his subject, and has only attempted "to sketch the teaching of four representative English poets"—taken at "four representative periods of the national life"—in regard to "the Personality of Christ and the spirit of His teaching." The history of popular theology in England has been, he maintains, in a great measure the history of Christology, and as such the poets throw invaluable light upon it.

The Dean's first lecture deals with Cynewulf, whose saga-like poetry embodies, he believes, the spirit of Anglo-Saxon Christianity. Of the poet's outward life

almost nothing seems to be known. He lived about the time of the unification of England, probably upon the Yorkshire or the Norfolk coast. His love of the sea and his familiarity with seafaring terms prove that he did not live inland; his love of fighting and his knowledge of "the pomp and circumstance of war" are out of place in a monk, though his acquaintance with the Liturgies of the Church suggests a scholastic education. His poems refer to some great crisis which took place in his life, and imply that he experienced some form of conversion. Apparently the happiness of a careless youth came to an abrupt end in a sudden seizure of remorse. He compares this crisis to a "storm which ends in silence," and describes a temporary loss of his "song-craft." His inspiration, however, returned to him, though with a difference. "God Himself unlocked the power of poetry in my breast," he tells us; and henceforth the thought of the divine government is never out of his mind, though his work is by no means entirely religious. "In guard of God stands the green plain decked with many streams and bright flowers," we read; and these words seem to epitomise his conception of the world. His Christianity is the Christianity of the

Creeds rather than of the Gospels, and its atmosphere is pagan rather than Apostolic. He thinks of our Lord as "a Divine and Imperial Figure, supreme over heaven and earth." He is the ascended Christ, victorious over sin and death, "the world shaper, God's spirit-son." In less exalted mood, He is "the Holy Hero—warrior King of glory," "the Helm of Heaven," directing its irresistible force, surrounded by legions of angels who are "the bards of the battle,"—in fact, a great militant power on the side of righteousness whom they reckon wrong who reckon without :—

> "O King! Thou art the wall-stone,
> which of old the workmen
> from their work rejected."

In his next lecture Dean Stubbs takes us from England at the beginning to England at the end of the Middle Ages, and we seem to be in a new world and in presence of a different religion. As we read the poetry of Langland we may understand, Dean Stubbs tells us, "how the spirit of social liberty learned in the school of Christ was preached to Englishmen in the fourteenth century." The figure of Christ that he reveals to us "is no imperial king reigning supreme in far-off

splendour," but " the Master of Conscience," the " homely and the friendly Christ " who dwells " with humble men, helping them with their crafts, teaching them to plough and to ditch, and to live a leal life and a true, a Divine Comrade, ' who standeth at the right hand of the Poor.' " In " the fair field full of folk," which represents the world in Langland's dream, are men of all sorts making their living in all ways,—labourers who

" In setting and in sowing swonken full hard
And won what masters with gluttony waste " ;

other men who live by " chaffer,"—

" They thrive the better
As it seemeth to our sight as such men thrive " ;

minstrels, too, for whom the poet has a tenderness—

" Getting gold with their glee, yet guiltless, I trust " ;

and

" Beggars with bags
Crammed full of bread, and drunken and lazy,"

for whom he has none. To all these " Piers Plowman," the poet's hero, preaches. Each man has " grace to guide himself with," he declares. " Crown conscience King and make work your steward," he exhorts. A Christian community should be a brotherhood in which

all work is honourable, whether men "ride and recover what unrightfully was won," or "till, ditch and thatch," or "buy and sell," or whether they, "as preachers and priests and prentices of law," earn their living "by labour of tongue," or set themselves to "design skilfully and colours to make." All are to be "loyal," and "each craft to love others," avoiding pride, envy, and idleness. The poet recognises three degrees of righteousness. He does well who "is true of his tongue and of his two hands, and through his labour or through his land his livelihood winneth, and taketh but his own." He does better who does this and "much more," who is "as low as a lamb, and lovely of speech, and helpeth all men, after that them needeth," for "Love is Leech of Life" and "leader of the Lord's folk in Heaven." He does best who is a moral power in the world and goes through the world with "a bishop's cross," "hooked on one end, to hale men from hell," in his hand. As the poet's own conception of the perfect man becomes clearer and clearer in his eyes he imagines that he sees in his hands and sides the marks of the Passion. Piers Plowman stands "with a cross before the common people." But the poet will not

recognise Christ by the stigmata alone. "Then called I Conscience to ken me the truth," he writes, and by the light of his moral sense he decides, " It is Christ." The transfiguration of the ploughman is not artistically managed. The doctrinal teaching of the poet is not very clear, but he evidently has deduced from the doctrine of the Incarnation the further doctrine of a divine element in all humanity :—

" ' God is love,' saith the text, and it teaches you all
That Truth can be trusted, like dear God Himself.
Who is true of his tongue and telleth no other,
Doeth works that go with it and willeth no man an ill,
Is a god, by the Gospel, aground and aloft,
Yea, like to our Lord, by St. Luke's own words.
And clerks who know this should teach it about,
For Christian and unchristian lay claim to the Truth."

The conceptions of Cynewulf and Langland still represent two permanent currents of popular religious sentiment. The righteous " world shaper," giving victory and dominion to those best fitted to bear rule, for ever strengthening the arm of the just and increasing the joy of the struggle, is a great conception, and interprets one side of the English mind. The idea of " the homely and the friendly Christ " urging His followers to " crown conscience King and make work your

steward" is also typically English. In these two ideals we trace the justice-loving, martial, and romantic energy of our people, for ever kept within bounds by the spirit of Puritanism and of pity. The conception of Cynewulf can never again satisfy—but it does still inspire—a Christian State. The social conscience which Langland interpreted will never sleep in this country. However wide our dominions, however great our triumphs, again and again his words prove themselves prophetic :—

> "Jesus Christ of Heaven
> In a poor man's apparell pursueth us ever."

CHAPTER IX

THE BIBLE AS A BOOK

THEORETICALLY, it is absurd to regard the Bible as one book, but practically it is, and will be so regarded. Of late years it has been submitted to a severe critical analysis. By scholars it has been divided into its component parts, and these have been docketed, dated, analysed, appraised. For the ordinary man, however, it remains a whole, and in matters pertaining to religion the voice of the ordinary man has weight. Nor, even from the point of view of the critic, is he altogether wrong in his instinctive conclusion. As a record of religious experience the Bible has a unity, it is a whole, and it stands alone. Our fathers called it "the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture," but in the sense in which they used the phrase we cannot use it now. We no longer forbid the man of science or the historian to differ from Moses or St. Paul. We many of us realise that the worshippers of the Book have endangered its authority more than its critics. The Bible itself forbids such irrational reverence. Do we not read in its

earlier pages of the binding nature of the Mosaic law, a law designed to direct every action of the Jew from birth to death? Yet when Israel became enslaved to the letter the prophets were inspired to break this idol of ceremonialism by the preaching of a better sacrifice, "a humble, and a contrite heart," and Christ Himself crushed it underfoot when He denied that the sanction of Scripture could justify revenge or the law of Moses make any meat unclean. "No man hath seen God at any time," declares the Bible, and the visions of the patriarchs therein recorded fade away before a clearer revelation. If we insist upon regarding the Bible as one book, we must admit that it goes back upon itself. Could it be otherwise in a true history of man's search for God? "If we will be the sons of the truth, we must consider what it speaketh, and trample upon our own credit, yea, and upon other men's, too, if either be anyway a hindrance to it," wrote the translators of the Authorised Version, and surely their words are in harmony with the Scriptures.

But if the Spirit of Truth who is guiding us unto all truth obliges us to say in this age that the Bible is not at all times consistent with itself, is not that tantamount to saying that

its authority is gone? This is a difficulty into which the Bibliolatry of the past has thrown the present generation of Christians. The foundation of religion, according to both reason and Scripture, is religious experience,—is, in other words, the action of the divine upon the human spirit. This action can be felt, but not defined, and must be expressed in similitudes. St. John speaks of the Word of God as a light that lights every man. The Scripture itself is not that light, but it does, as no other book has ever done, bear witness to that light. It must for Christendom remain the greatest of the reflected lights. That light can come to men by other reflectors, that God can dispense with this record of His dealings in the past, no one doubts to-day. The fact that our Lord never suggested that any word He said should be written down, or proposed to His Disciples to add to the Scriptures—the writers of the New Testament did not regard their writings as Scripture—implies that He did not think of religion as depending upon any literature, however sacred. This fact is the more significant in that He declared that His teaching should never perish out of men's hearts, be the secular and spiritual changes of the time to

come what they might,—though heaven and earth should pass away.

It is a truism to say that all great literature interprets and heightens thought. We cannot appreciate any writer whose thought is altogether different in kind from our own. We do not fully understand him until we have a sense that he is giving us voice rather than instruction. "How true that is!" we say. Unless we had some understanding of men and manners we could not recognise that Shakespeare understood them infinitely better than we do. Without love what were all the lyrics of the world?—tinkling cymbals indeed. The history of Christendom proves that all this is true of the Bible in a supreme degree. In its pages men find themselves, men of more widely different calibre and environment than have ever found themselves in any other book. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart," said St. Paul, and this is the message of the Scriptures.

There is hardly a phase of man's religious consciousness which does not find expression in the Bible. Adam and Eve have become names to us. Like Romulus and Remus, they are now dim figures on the far horizon, mere points whence starts a great tradition.

But it is true—and it is as true of individuals and nations as it is of the world—that there is a moment when, rising out of moral unconsciousness, we fall in our own newly enlightened sight into the position of sinners. Cain and Abel, too, are shadowy figures enough, but the mark on the forehead of the murderer is still visible, and do we not all know that the branding-iron of conscience is still hot? Noah's ark suggests a children's toy, yet the destruction of a nation which sits down to eat and drink and rises up to play is still sure. Can any mythical stories of plagues which attacked the first-born, of waters turned to blood, obscure the truth with which the suffering soul of a captive people is drawn for us in the Book of Exodus, —a people who sigh to be masters of their own hands and free to worship openly the God of their conscience? Can the passion of patriotism, with its strange affinity to the religious instinct, be ever again expressed as it is expressed in the Old Testament? How many of the oppressed have wept in spirit beside the waters of Babylon since the singer of Israel cast the bitterness of their hearts into everlasting form?

To take another aspect of human emotion

inseparable from the religious instinct, where do we find hero-worship as well portrayed and comprehended as in the Bible? A spirit of carping literalism may complain that David, man of blood and victim of passion as he was, should be called a man "after God's own heart"; but all sympathetic readers must know what the chronicler meant. They will set the genius of the shepherd-King, his chivalry, his courage, and his contrition, against his sins, and will realise, as they read of his generosity to a foe and his tenderness to his rebellious son, why he "bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man." Or take a totally different and no less eternally lovable type, Joseph, with his tolerance and kindness, which no offence can dispel,—a type which Christianity has rendered more common, sweetening as it does resentment into humour.

No one now supposes that the story of Job is historical, or was ever intended so to appear. Yet what history was ever so true to Nature? Where else can we find the agony of religious doubt put before us in more fearful colours? Has the divine arrogance of the human heart, as it seeks to justify its Creator, ever been so vividly portrayed? Once more to change

our theme, does not Ecclesiastes interpret for us the seared heart of the man of pleasure revealing the germ of life under the charred ashes in a manner so true as to be for ever new, —the heart of the man who lives for sensual delight, yet cannot forget God? Again, as we read Proverbs, shrewd and even sordid as these scraps of folk-wisdom at times appear, can we go through a page and forget that the wiseacres of Jerusalem had heard the voice of God speaking out of the clouds of common life? Can we doubt that the prophets spake by the Holy Ghost when we see how Isaiah sets the theologians and ecclesiastics of all time in derision as he makes us listen for the direct reasoning together of God and man?

But it may be said: "You Liberal Churchmen who speak so glibly of the Bible, what are your real views on the subject of religious authority? Why do you so often evade plain questions and take refuge in the mist?" An accusation of want of candour is always offensive. It is for Liberal Churchmen to consider seriously whether or not it is just. But surely neither the orthodox nor the sceptical can logically require a Christian to speak where Christ was silent. Christ refused definitely to lay down a theory about

authority. By what authority did He teach? demanded the theologians of His time. Our Lord replied by another question. By what authority did John the Baptist teach? He asked, and left them to their speculations. Christendom has made two tremendous attempts to solve a problem which Christ left open, and has failed. He appealed to men's conscience, to their reason, to their common-sense, to their affections, to their inspiration, and He appealed to the record of all these authorities in Scripture. He told them to exercise their own power of judging what was right. He asked them whether it stood to reason that the God of all the earth could be offended by the omission of a ceremony, or a soul polluted by a forgotten formality. He told them to consider their relation to their own children when they considered the relation of God to themselves, and He told them that the dominion of death is over the body alone. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." He told them that the true aim of all religion, spiritual and ceremonial, was the service of God and man, and that in that service their powers would be called forth to the uttermost: "all thy heart," and "all

6—(2450)

thy soul," and " all thy mind," and " all thy strength." The spirit of Christ points men along the hard road which leads by thought and struggle towards truth. The sufferings in the way are great, as, indeed, the Bible records. Small wonder that toil-worn men have invented the sleep-giving drug of " absolute authority " !

CHAPTER X

CHRIST AND CONVICTION

IT is very commonly said that people are less religious than they used to be, and there is a sense in which the statement is true. Since the Reformation there has never been a time when thoughtful men were as much preoccupied with the subject of religion as they are now, but there is no doubt less clear-cut religious conviction than formerly. An immense number of religious people must be described as "of doubtful mind." The attraction of Christianity is felt by all, but how many of those who feel its attraction could honestly declare themselves absolutely and irrevocably convinced of the faith? One of the most potent among the many causes for this painful condition of hesitancy is a widely spread suspicion that Christianity demands the submission of the reason, that the Churches still seek to enslave thought, and that for their attitude in this matter they cite the authority of Christ. Rome does so; the last Encyclical makes that certain. And though the idea of private judgment lies at

the root of Protestantism, yet the dogmatism of Protestant formularies makes it difficult to clear the Reformed Churches wholly from the same charge. In greater or less degree, both —if we hold to the letter of their law—demand the submission of the reason. The crucial question is, Did Christ demand it? If so, we must sadly admit that He asks the impossible. It is a submission which a very large number of men cannot make in the present day. They have come to realise with St. Paul that "we can do nothing against the truth." But is there any evidence that He did?

The attempt so often made of late to prove that the Evangelists present their readers with no intellectual difficulties is one with which we have not the smallest sympathy. The intellectual difficulties which confront us in the Gospels are very great indeed. To take two of the most obvious, if least important. The Evangelists believed in possession, and the plain inference from their narratives is that our Lord acquiesced in this current explanation of nervous and mental disease. This fact, if it be once acknowledged, has very serious bearings upon many vital questions, but we doubt whether it has any bearing

at all upon the one at issue. It is certain that many of the staunchest upholders of freedom of thought to-day are taking for granted scientific explanations which will be by future generations regarded as erroneous. Again, He quoted certain incidents from the Old Testament the historical accuracy of which we do not accept to-day. It is absurd to minimise the consequences of this inevitable conclusion, but it is more absurd to deduce from it that Christ denied to His followers the right to study history. The attitude of a preacher towards the pursuit of truth cannot be judged of by the unhistorical nature of his literary allusions and illustrations. For our own part, we cannot help believing that any candid and thoughtful person who, putting theology in the usual sense of the word out of his mind, will read the Gospel through, will come away with the strong impression that, so far from restricting his right to use his reason, our Lord makes perpetual appeal to him to use it more freely. Of course, every teacher must desire to bring conviction to the minds of his hearers. The difference between the obscurantist and the man who insists that every man should walk by the light is, that the one tries to convince his hearers by making

them think and the other by forbidding them to do so.

Christ's method was never inquisitorial. He made no effort to force men's confidence. He did not ask them to confess their sins or their doubts, neither did He apply any intellectual test before admitting them as His adherents, not even the easy one of full belief in their own Scriptures. He said He would turn out no one who came, but they must be prepared for sacrifice. The great majority of His hearers believed implicitly in the sacred writings, and our Lord appealed to them continually in support of His teaching. Nevertheless, upon more than one occasion He set aside, and even contradicted, their plain teaching, as, for instance, when He declared that " An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth " represented a false standard of morality ; and He epitomised the law and the prophets in such a manner as to justify every future critic in refusing the authority of every word which offends against the Christian conscience. Christ's Sermon on the Mount and the cursing Psalms are irreconcilable. We cannot twist Christ's teaching till we make it tally with Samuel's.

At the same time, He invariably spoke of

faith as a virtue, and apparently regarded it as essential, if not to the health, at least to the healing both of body and soul, and He continually exhorted His Disciples to believe. By faith, however, it is perfectly obvious that He did not mean the submission of the reason to the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures. If so, how could He have said that He had not found in Israel so great a faith as was displayed by a certain Roman soldier by whom the Scriptures, if they were known at all, were probably regarded as a superstition, and who can by no possibility, have had any ideas of a Christian dogma which had not begun to be formulated? A sense of hopeful dependence upon God would seem to be the temper of mind which our Lord was always commending and recommending. Can the conviction implied in such a state of mind be said to hamper the reason? It is true that He several times asked for an expression of faith in Himself. To take two typical instances. He asked it of the anxious father who begged Him to restore the reason of his son, and He asked it of those who listened to His last discourse, which the Fourth Gospel alone records. In both cases the words read like a strong appeal for confidence. That is

quite evidently how the man in desperate anxiety understood it. Clearly he did not imagine that any intellectual proposition was made to him when he exclaimed: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." He simply stated his confidence, and earnestly desired its further confirmation. Again, when at the end of His earthly life Christ is urging faith in His divine mission, He makes His appeal in like manner. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me," He urges. Why are they so "troubled" and "afraid"? There is "spirit" and "life" in His teaching, He assures them, because "the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me," for "I have not spoken of myself." The creed of Christ was simple. His rule of life is hard. It is nothing less than the acceptance of the service of God and of man, and the unconditional rejection of the service of Mammon. It is not possible to argue that Christ did not restrict human freedom. He bound men by the hard law of conscience. He sought to force them into the presence of God, that by the "Light of Light" they might see that the hopes and fears which seem to foreshadow a future life were divinely inspired. He sought to bind the will, but never to

cripple the mind. He said that those who doubted His system in theory would find it true in practice. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Yet even for Himself He did not assume the condemnatory authority which the Church has assumed in His name. "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world," we read. The sentence, on account of its rider, is commonly interpreted as a kind of covert threat. "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day," He goes on. Surely such an interpretation is out of character. Is it not rather as though a doctor should say: "I do not condemn the poor fellow because he will have nothing to say to my advice. I am here to cure, not condemn. In the end the facts will show him he is wrong"? Just before His betrayal He spoke to His Disciples of "the Spirit of truth." That Spirit, He said, is divine, and must be their guide, must lead them unto all truth, testifying to His own teaching, to which "ye also shall bear witness." "What is truth?" mused the cynical Roman Governor a few days after, when his prisoner had assured him that its

declaration was the highest end of life. "What, when we know it, is it worth?" must have been his next more practical consideration. Pilate acknowledged the truth of Christ's innocence, but he would risk nothing for his conviction. He let a just man be crucified in obedience to the suggestion of a set of malicious fanatics rather than cast the slightest slur upon the Imperial authority. He would not suffer for the truth. He let Him who had lived for it die for it.

CHAPTER XI

"THE HEART OF A STRANGER"

IT is evident from the Hebrew Scriptures that the instinctive attitude of the Jew towards strangers was adverse and contemptuous. It is no less evident, however, that among the later writers there arose those for whom tribal distinctions had little meaning, for whom Jehovah had ceased to be the God of Israel only, and who found in the worship of the God of all the earth a bond relating them to mankind at large. These men began to consider "the heart of a stranger," and to conceive of it by an effort of sympathy. As they pondered upon this matter their new convictions concerning the God of their fathers increased in force. They could not doubt that the stranger also had a spiritual heritage. "Thou shalt not oppress a stranger," they taught, "for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." For, said the seer, "the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which

regardeth not persons" ; not a God preoccupied with the children of Abraham to the exclusion of all else, but a God who "loveth the stranger." Then, as though he had been dimly feeling after the revelation of the Sermon on the Mount and the God therein set forth as "perfect," he adds: "Love ye therefore the stranger," and once more he calls to the minds of his hearers their own experience in captivity. In spite, however, of these counsels of perfection, it is probable that the position of "strangers" in Israel was a sad one, cut off as they inevitably were from the ceremonial and sacerdotal side of the common life with which for the Jewish populace duty, aspiration, and happiness were inextricably bound up.

The wider conception of God and of His relation to mankind which came first to a few men of genius, and afterwards through them to whomsoever would receive it, was accompanied by terrible mental unrest. The religious man, who could no longer regard God as a great chief, rewarding, punishing, and training his own people, could not but suffer some misgivings as to how far the God of the whole earth could be known at all. Plainly the history of a small people could no longer

furnish adequate data for a complete theology. The calamities and triumphs of the race, the fires and whirlwinds of patriotic tradition, had lost much of their theological significance. The Jew knew his own history; he did not know, and he had no means of knowing, the history of the world. Close upon a higher conception of the Deity followed the inevitable pain of estrangement. The God who had spoken with Moses, "face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend," was gone. The patriarchs had not seen Him face to face when they pictured Him to themselves as "the Lord of hosts" and the "God of battles," who had His dwelling in the midst of them, and could be propitiated by sacrifice and rendered favourable by a ceremonial. The Psalmist, who knew the sad heart of the alien, drew from that knowledge a metaphor whereby to express his own sense of spiritual exile. "I am a stranger with thee," he sighed, "and a sojourner, as all my fathers were."

The impossiblity of finding out God by searching presented itself with terrible clearness to the highest minds in Israel, and perhaps the emotional side of doubt and the agonies of spiritual disquiet were never expressed as passionately as in certain books

of Scripture. Those who see nothing in the Bible but a record of assured faith must surely read it without thought. By this failure of the records to reveal, and by the hopelessness of deducing a religion from the philosophy of history, the sages of Israel were thrown back upon the Inner Light. In a single sentence Elijah re-stated the method of search for divine truth, realising that evidence of God must be sought within the heart of man, who, made in the divine image, reflects and makes personal the divine essence. Those who have undergone what is called conversion all agree in declaring that the first effect of a heightened consciousness of the goodness of the Creator is a conviction of sin on the part of the creature. How far this is true it is difficult for the ordinary man to say, but it is certain that the first effects of new knowledge are generally accompanied by a conviction of ignorance, a conviction so vivid as sometimes to result in a sense of despair. The poet who wrote the spiritual drama called Job shows us a man forced to abandon many of the tenets of the inherited creed, and to proclaim his ignorance upon points on which his fathers had trusted that their knowledge was secure. The immediate

connexion between virtue and prosperity, vice and misery, became a matter of uncertainty to Job, and it is difficult at this distance of time, and in the light of the crucifixion of Christ, for us to realise how awful was the doubt involved. The remarkable thing is, that out of all this sense of estrangement came a far greater and far nobler faith, and one fitted for a far wider adherence,—better adapted, that is, to satisfy the spiritual aspirations of the heart of man. The result of the new knowledge was not in the end a new scepticism, but a renewed faith.

Religious history repeats itself. The mind of man changes much less than his environment. A fact which has long troubled and alarmed the faith of the prophets, and has long been acknowledged as a truth, has only lately taken its place as a conviction among the certainties of "the man in the street." Not only is God the God of the whole earth, about which we are in a fair way to know everything; He is the God of the infinite universe, about which we feel we can know nothing, and the science which exalts His creative power to the vanishing-point at which the mind can no longer follow it tends to dissolve our conception of His personality.

Once more the Psalmist's words recur with terrible force. The sense of estrangement is keen and bitter, and it is felt within the precincts of the Church. With it has grown up as of old a new sense of tolerance and sympathy. We are again beginning to consider "the heart of a stranger," and to realise that this God of gods and Lord of lords, so far above the gods and lords of men's former conception, is not likely to "regard persons" or accept propitiations,—not likely to subdivide the world, as priests and presbyters so often subdivide it, into the faithful, the indifferent, the doubtful, and the heathen. Perhaps it is only those who have felt themselves to be "strangers" who can know that the crowd lumped together as indifferents are, for the most part, only those to whom ceremonial worship makes no appeal, and who have not lived where the science of theology is sufficiently familiar to form a subject of common discussion, and that the honest doubter is often enough a man obsessed by religious thought, willing to learn what he can from the heathen, as the greater Jews learned from the Babylonians, and remembering that all men are taught of God. It is not easy, perhaps it is at the present time

impossible, to realise how the existing state of religious confusion can issue in a more established and a more wide-spread faith. Yet there seem already to be indications that as the outward, the material, evidences of religion seem to fail, the evidence from within may be more clear. It is not only Christians, as Tertullian declared in a burst of magical eloquence, who bear witness to Christ. In "the heart of a stranger" we find evidence of the Incarnation, for he, too, has hopes, aspirations, and ideals which lead him to conceive of one "like the Son of God." Unless Christ can fulfil the whole aspirations of man, we cannot see in Him "the fulness of the Godhead bodily." If He can fulfil them, then, though the record of Jesus of Nazareth be dimmed by the erasures of the learned and the tears of those who despair of accepting the wonders of the Gospel story, the world may rediscover by the light of the Spirit the Christ who prophesied that He would draw all men, and the stranger may in some dim future exclaim with the greatest of the Apostles: "It pleased God, who called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me."

7--(2450)

CHAPTER XII

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

It is not likely that ordinary men at the time of our Lord were what is generally called "very religious,"—ordinary men seldom are. It is possible that they were regarded by the theological and ritualistic experts of their day as indifferentists; such experts are apt so to regard them. Nevertheless, when Christ preached, while the chief priests sought to destroy Him, "the common people heard him gladly." They "pressed upon him to hear the word of God"; they "hanged upon Him," as the marginal reading has it. Clearly they were not indifferentists then, any more than they are indifferentists now. They were haunted by the hopes and fears which bear upon religion as the vast majority of men are still, either constantly or occasionally, according to their temperament and habit of mind. Why were they gladdened by the teaching of Christ? It is true that He preached deliverance from a ceremonial system, the bonds of which were becoming unbearably

galling, as all religious bonds become when men begin to suspect that the ceremonialism in which they have been brought up is superstitious; but it is not by negative teaching that gladness of heart is produced. It is easy to say that it was because Christ taught "faith" in contradistinction to the elaborate system of law taught by the scribes. On the other hand, it is very difficult to define what "faith" means. One thing is certain. Christ did not demand a detailed intellectual subscription; but that fact only tells us what Christian faith is not, not what it is. St. Paul's enthusiastic reasonings on the subject hardly appeal to the ordinary non-theological man, but they are lighted up by flashes of genius which appeal to everyone. When he tells us of a typically faithful man that he "against hope believed in hope," we perfectly understand him. And was not that what Christ taught "the common people" to do? And is not that why they heard Him gladly?

Life itself, without any help from ecclesiasticism, keeps the world in mind of religion, in mind, that is, of God. The whole world has tried from the beginning "if haply they might feel after him, and find him," and the

mass of ordinary men have always believed that "he is not far." Our friends die. Death reminds us fearfully but effectually of spiritual things. The difference between a man and a corpse remains plain, though science and theology should dispute for ever. All the world over, men hope that the dominion of death is not absolute. The hope recurs again and again in defiance of the terrible arguments for which absence leaves room. Christ declared this hope to be well founded, to be, indeed, the essential truth at the bottom of human nature. "It is the spirit that quickeneth," He said; "the flesh profiteth nothing." Is it surprising that ordinary men heard that gladly? But it is not by death alone that men's thoughts are turned to God; the mystery of life awakens religious thought. The love and solicitude to which the fact of parentage gives birth inevitably turn the mind to the origin of life. They suggest hope in regard to the relation of the Creator to the creature. Christ strongly confirmed this hope. It is the corner-stone of Christianity, the type of the Fatherhood of God. But outside the tremendous questions of life and death, ordinary everyday experience points continually in a religious direction and gives

rise to a religious hope. Surely there must be justice somewhere !—that is the instinctive cry of the human heart, a hope thwarted at every turn, yet absolutely indelible. Almost all the parables of Christ were spoken to confirm this hope. In the end Providence is on the side of justice, is the moral of how many of them ? The human heart, however, is not logical. The hope of pardon is every bit as instinctive as the desire for judgment. This hope also Christ sought to transform into assurance. There is one article in the creed of Christendom which our Lord taught with all possible dogmatism, and that is the forgiveness of sins. In the parable of the Prodigal Son we have its one perfect and sufficient illustration. Men are not, however, satisfied by the forgiveness of God alone. They hope for the forgiveness of men. Christ taught that they should endeavour to confirm this hope in each other, every man forgiving from his heart. Again, there is a great hope in the heart of humanity which becomes articulate only in their instinctive admiration of heroism. The ordinary crowd, whether it puts its thought into logical form or not, hopes devoutly that sacrifice is worth while, that when a man gives up

his life for his friend we are in presence of a question which is not answered when we have considered the relative value of their lives to the world at large. We hope, too, that no cause is lost because a man gives up by dying his power to help it along. Christ made, to use a colloquial phrase, a religion of this hope. He gave it everlasting expression in a paradox which no man who has heard it can forget. "He that loveth his life shall lose it." This sentence is of the essence of Christianity,—as it were, the motto of the Cross. In sacrifice He finds an eternal preservation.

There is another great hope inherent in the human heart. We all hope that chance is an illusion. The thought of a fortuitous concourse of atoms and events is maddening to us. At the same time, we hope we are not in the hands of an inexorable fate. Christ taught that the hairs of our head are numbered; that every living thing is—in its order—a subject of divine care and foreknowledge. None the less, every one of our Lord's exhortations, and His whole teaching on the subject of prayers, imply that the will is free. The reason cannot harmonise these opposite theories. Yet ordinary men accept

the encouragement of Christ to put faith in both. There is a hope with which what we call the drama of life constantly inspires the heart of good people, and that is the hope that in the moral scheme of things, wherein action should reasonably be everything, attitude also counts. It counts here with men; it may count, men hope, with the Eternal. There are many people whose moral nature is, so to speak, unsuccessful. If we sum up what they have done in life, there is a terrible balance on the wrong side; but they are lovable, and we hope that God also will look to that. We are sure they are often better men and women than the men and women who do better. Our Lord in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican confirmed this hope. Imagine people hearing that story for the first time. Is it strange that "the common people heard him gladly"? Most of us who have seen much of suffering and much of the unselfishness which seems to bring nothing but oppression, the innocence which unfits for the fray, have in the midst of a bitter and almost resentful sense of pity been surprised by a strange gleam of hope. These sad people have gained something, we see; these unselfish souls are

not without a recompense; these simple-minded people have made a discovery in spite of their worldly blindness. The words of Christ ring in our ears whatever may be our personal creed. There are moments when all people who are not cynics know that there is some unaccountable comfort which does often come to those that mourn, that the meek have no mean inheritance, and that the pure in heart—who ignore so much—see God.

There is some quality in the mind of the common people which is potent to dissolve systems. Theological systems are erected as a sacrifice to logic, and "the common people" are not logical. The living part of Christianity—the Christianity Christ taught—produces very much the same result in simple people, no matter under what form they receive it. They still hear Christ gladly, and give but a conventional attention to the scribes. People who have to work hard in order to live have very little time or thought to spare for theological reasoning. Moreover, it wearies them. But everyone has time for hope, and hope confirmed is the most prolific source of joy. Christ gathered up and expressed the hope of the world, in terms of faith.

CHAPTER XIII

CHRISTIANITY AND THE CONSCIENCE

DOES the religion of Christ uphold the absolute authority of conscience? This is a question which the present tendency to doubt authority in all its outward forms must bring home more and more intensely to all Christians. Like so many moral and religious questions, it cannot be adequately answered by "Yes" or "No." Without doubt Christ appealed continually to the authority of conscience. Almost all his parabolic and figurative teaching is plainly designed to elicit its instinctive confirmation. In its simplest forms He respects its dictates, and conforms to its longings for absolute justice. Our Lord, who taught us that if we would be Godlike we must forgive our enemies, does not hesitate to point a moral by describing how the enemies of a righteous ruler came by their deserts in accordance with the righteous indignation of a just man. St. Paul in like manner believed that the Gospel would best be spread by an appeal to the natural moral sense.

"Commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God," he says. On the other hand, it would be impossible to maintain that either our Lord or St. Paul regarded either the corporate or the individual conscience as morally infallible. Christ, indeed, declared that He foresaw a time when men would persecute their brethren to the death on account of their religious opinions, and would even think that in so doing they did God service. On the same principle, He forbore to condemn the soldiers who, in accordance with what they considered their duty, carried out what the enlightened conscience was to proclaim the typical crime of the world's history. But even if we admit that, while in the vast majority of cases the verdict of conscience is unquestionable, in certain instances a man may do a definitely wicked act unrebuked by his conscience and stand excused by his ignorance, we are still far from grasping the whole teaching of the New Testament on the subject of moral responsibility. St. Paul evidently considered —indeed, he literally said—that harmless and indifferent acts when performed by those who regarded them as wrong partook of the nature of sin. For instance, our Lord had definitely

declared that no one by the act of eating could be spiritually defiled. St. Paul accepted His conclusion, and preached it unhesitatingly to the Church. "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself," he said, for "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men." At the same time, he recommended those who remained unconvinced not to eat meat offered to idols if they were not inwardly persuaded that they were right in doing so. On no account must they eat and doubt, for that was to court their own condemnation. Also he exhorted all supercilious critics of their scrupulosity to let them alone. It was better, he said, not to eat flesh at all while the world endured than to lead someone else to do so against his conscience. It is a curious fact, and one we do not remember to have seen remarked by the commentators, that St. Paul does not condemn the man who cannot satisfy his conscience by the thought of Christ's permission. From his own robust point of view, he could not help regarding him as somewhat

weak-kneed, but he earnestly believed and taught that, since he meant right, he was by Christianity justified, and would be "holden up," for "God is able to make him stand."

There is no actual saying of our Lord's in the Four Gospels which goes quite as far as St. Paul's. "To him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean"; but there is a traditional saying—quoted in the "Codex Bezæ" (D), the important MS. of the Gospels at Cambridge, in connection with the narrative of David and the shew-bread, mentioned by St. Luke—on which it is not impossible that St. Paul founded his very decisive teaching in the matter of conscience. The passage runs as follows: "On the same day, having seen one working on the Sabbath, He said to him, O man, if indeed thou knowest what thou doest, thou art blessed: but if thou knowest not, thou art accursed, and a transgressor of the law." ["Knowest" here of course means—art aware of the full significance of the act, art acting with a deliberate intention, and not out of carelessness or indifference to whether the act is right or wrong.] St. Paul's words, "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing

which he alloweth," suggest a familiarity with the incident.

What, then, are we to conclude? Clearly conscience is not infallible, since it may prompt one man to work and another to refrain from working on the Sabbath Day. On the other hand, both will be justified by their obedience, which looks as though conscience, if a fallible, must yet be regarded as a supreme authority. Our Lord would seem never to set aside its verdict. It is as though, to use a very modern figure of speech, He was always tuning the "receiver" of divine messages, seeking not the destruction, but the better fulfilment, of the inward law; and it is surprising to find that the instrument He uses for the correction of conscience is almost always common-sense. That the true aim of life is the service of God and man had already dawned upon the Jewish moral sense. But this service, our Lord explained, must be imperfect while a man could acknowledge to himself that he had enemies whom it was his object to injure. The Scribes and Pharisees loved those only who loved them, He said, and it was plain to be seen that by this restriction their service was rendered ineffectual. He does not blame those who are

meticulous in the observation of the ceremonial law; but by an appeal to their common-sense He readjusts the proportion of their scruples. They must fix their minds, He says, upon the weightier matters of the law, and then the tithing of mint and rue will seem a matter of small importance. On the same principle, we may say that the Christian argument against persecution does not rest upon the fact—or rather fiction—that it does not matter what a man believes, but upon the common-sense consideration that cruelty and murder remain cruelty and murder whether the convictions of the victim be right or wrong. Charity remains the pre-eminent Christian virtue, to whomsoever it may be exercised; and since it is true that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," we may surely argue that where there is no liberty of conscience there is no spirit of Christ.

We think that any fair-minded reader of the Gospels must be left with the following impression on the subject of conscience. Our Lord seems to take it for granted that, broadly speaking, the human conscience is a true guide, and that upon matters of right and wrong, there is a consensus of sane opinion.

He does not deny, however, that a definite, and to the ordinary mind an easily recognisable, sin may be committed without rebuke from the individual conscience. How far a man may be to blame for its imperfection He makes no direct statement, but He clearly regards that imperfection as, in many cases, a moral excuse. If a man is unaware that he is doing wrong, we must consider his conduct in the light of his ignorance, He teaches. Here again He appeals to common-sense. Who would be very hard on a servant whose disobedience was unintentional? "He that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes should be beaten with few stripes."

St. Paul, as we have shown, distinctly stated that a man who had committed no breach at all of the moral law may be made by his conscience not only a coward but a criminal, and if we accept the traditional sentence quoted above, his words were not out of harmony with those of Christ. Christianity leaves the question of conscience, as it leaves so many others, theoretically very obscure, regarding it as the supreme yet imperfect medium of revelation. On the other hand, the teaching both of Christ and St. Paul upon the subject throws a clear light

upon the path of practice sufficient to enable those who can accept it simply and without logic-chopping to judge righteous judgment, and continually to advance in moral perception, though they should be forced by logicians to admit that theoretically they have no infallible authority.

CHAPTER XIV

CHRISTIANITY AND REVIVAL

"IF ever there was a divine attempt made to shake religion free of its wrappings it was the preaching of Christ," says Mr. Benson in the most intimate, and perhaps the most interesting, of the eighteen essays which he has lately published ("From a College Window," by A. C. Benson ; Smith, Elder and Co., 7s. 6d. net). Christianity, he goes on, "is a message to individual hearts bewildered by the complexity of the world and the intricacy of religious observances." In these words Mr. Benson suggests the extraordinary power of resurrection which seems to be inherent in the faith of Christ. Again and again the light of the Gospel burns low. Again and again the thoughtful come to regard its teaching, not as good news, but as ancient history,—the tradition of "one Jesus which was dead" whom Paul "affirmed to be alive." It is as true of nations as of individuals that the sense of the supernatural is not at all times equally insistent. There are periods in the lives of most men when the mind seems

8—(2450)

to be suddenly disconnected—if a word of such secular associations may be used in a religious sense—from the source of spiritual life. Such an experience may come amid the cares or the pleasures of this life, in prosperity, or adversity, or even in the midst of moral struggle or spiritual anxiety. Call the experience what you will, a dispensation of Providence or a snare of the Devil, it is a fact of the spiritual life. It comes to the souls of men and of communities, and is no certain sign of decadence in the character either of a man or of a people. An augmented sense of the actual, a vivid realisation of what is going on in the outside world, almost always accompanies it for good or for evil. A repugnance to the recognised forms of worship is one of its first signs. The symbols of faith lose their significance. They no longer create reverence. In the minds of the imaginative they retain an artistic value; in the minds of the multitude they become contemptible. Who has not felt at moments, even in the most splendid of Cathedrals, that there is nothing there but what is of the earth earthy? The church which was built for the glory of God and in memory of His saints, wherein many generations have seen by faith "the

Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up," while "His train filled the temple," becomes the scene of a performance. It is a strong convention which can keep a man in this mood within the building, and when a crowd is seized by the same emotion they either break down the altars and deface the fane, or they surge out determined never to re-enter. Thoughts of what we call the facts of life throng the mind in this mood. Men see the suffering of the world. They knew it was there before, but now they see it close and see its details, and their hearts are filled with pity and rebellion. Turning away from an unbearable sight, they fix their eyes upon the intoxicating vision of worldly success. Life is a great gamble, they say to themselves, a fearful adventure, but what prizes, what delights await the fortunate! In this state of material exaltation they become conscious as they never were conscious before of the fearful pace of time. The same end awaits the happy and the unhappy, and it is so very near to both. Restlessness takes hold of the soul of the people, with the love of pleasure and the fear of death. At such a time the mind of the intellectual man applies itself to investigation, and finds exercise in the

tabulation of demonstrable certainties and their application to human convenience. The imagination of the more spiritually gifted confines itself to this world. Social problems take the place of polemical discussions. Heaven lies hidden behind Utopia. The metaphysical structures of elaborate dogma which embodied the devotional thought of the Middle Ages are treated by secular critics as Cromwell's soldiers treated the Churches.

Who can excuse or condemn ? The difference between iconoclasm and blasphemy is very fine. The world is destroying religion, cry fearful believers and braggart sceptics in one breath ; yet both would hesitate to translate their thought into plain words, and to say that man is destroying God. The proposition is absurd. The Psalmist's fool dare not put it into words. All the while that the mass of the people seem most God-forsaken, the awakened conscience of the community bears witness to a faithful Creator who has never yet " left all things to their course, And laid the reins upon the horse." A conviction of sin preludes every reformation, and gives rise to a sporadic enthusiasm for morality. Such enthusiasm is of the nature of a religion, though it is emphatically

not Christianity. Yet it does seem to make men acknowledge that the Kingdom of Heaven is within, safe from the violence of those who storm the citadel of dogma with every new explosive that science can devise. Argue and split hairs as we may, the only basis of morality which ordinary men will ever acknowledge is conscience. Consciences differ and so do eyes. One man is an artist, another is none; but right and wrong, like red and green, have a definite meaning to normal minds. Belief in inspiration never dies out; it is burned in by the bitterness of remorse. Within the hearts of men sound the "lively oracles of God," and from the moment that men cease to argue and begin to listen the smouldering embers of Christianity again give light and heat. With every revival of religion men realise afresh that it is only the things of the Spirit which are eternal. The outward expressions of Christianity are temporal, and before they disappear they decay. What remains is the Personality of the Son of Man, which never ceases to attract the heart of the Western races. All the better instincts of man—his scruples, his compassions, his hopes, his sense of responsibility, his intuitive belief

in prayer, his unreasoning faith in forgiveness—find an interpretation in the New Testament. Whether we regard it as a verbally inspired book, or, like Mr. Benson, as " records of obscure and mysterious origin, transcriptions, it would seem, of something oral and traditional," the Personality of Christ stands out from its pages, and His words are not as those of the Scribes. Whatever waves of scepticism pass over the world, they seem unable wholly to quench the conviction of Christendom that Christianity is in its essence true ; that its truth is independent of metaphysical arguments and ecclesiastical systems. It shines through both, and in the end burns them to ashes. The only witness to Christ which cannot be shaken is the witness of the spirit,—the only witness, moreover, to which a world condemned to eat its bread in the sweat of its brow will ever have time to listen. The good news of the Gospel is a divine confirmation of the aspirations of men. " The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," said St. John, and in the human record of that divine sojourn lies an inherent power to revive the faith.

CHAPTER XV

CHRIST AND THE SENSE OF JUSTICE

THE place of what we call justice in the Christian system of ethics is not very easy to determine. Our Lord made continual appeal to the natural sense of justice. At the same time, He told parables, propounded problems, and pointed to facts deliberately calculated to shake the faith of His hearers in the infallibility of their instinctive feeling on the subject. Many of his stories end with a rough sketch of poetic retribution. We hear of a master who returns unexpectedly to punish his oppressive substitute; of a landlord who avenges the injuries done to his agents; of the vicarious gratitude of the Son of Man for kindnesses long forgotten by the doer; of the certainty of an ultimate reckoning to be taken even of those cruelties which arose less from malevolence than neglect. The hearers are not only permitted but invited to take pleasure in contemplating the sure operation of the mills of God. Nevertheless there are certain allegories and certain plain sayings of Christ which, if they are not in direct

contradiction to the ordinary sense of justice, at least insist that it should be to a great extent revised. Take the story of the labourers who agreed to work all day for a given sum, and then complained because certain other men who were put on to work much later received the same wage. At first sight the arrangement seems exceedingly unfair. The instinct of the reader suggests a fellow-feeling for the grumblers. Surely those who bear the burden and heat of the day should gain more than those who do an easy piece of work in the cool of the evening. Our Lord, however, had not the smallest sympathy with the malcontents. They should, He implies, have minded their own business, and abided by their bargain. "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" are the words put into the mouth of the employer, and the employer, we are taught, was entirely within his right in so replying to his men. Again, the mental position of the elder son in the parable appeals very much to the reader's instinctive sense of justice. But Christ, though He is far from condemning the elder son ("Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine," cannot be turned by the most pharisaical of minds into a harsh speech),

yet makes him stand before His hearers as a type of a good man in the wrong, occupying for the moment, and by reason of his advocacy of superficial equity, a very undignified moral position. To turn from stories to statements. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," is a saying which could give nothing but delight to any well-meaning person. But our Lord did not stop there. He said also: "more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance." To the moral plodder the sentence does give something of a cold shock. What is the use of so much effort if those who do not make it succeed as well, if the secret of making the best of both worlds lies with the sinner all the time? While we are thinking of hard sayings on the subject of justice we must not forget the question which Christ put to Simon: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?" Once more the suggestion is hard for the moral plodder, and again our Lord does not stop short at suggestion.

"Her sins, which are many, are forgiven," He says; "for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

What are we to gather from all this rather conflicting evidence that our Lord thought of justice? It seems to us that he considered a sense of justice to be the great moral stand-by of the ordinary man. He appealed to it as a goad and an enticement to do right and to avoid wrong. At the same time, He evidently thought that, cardinal virtue though it is, it is none the less exceedingly liable to parasitic growths of a non-moral, and even an immoral, character. Cruelty, revenge, envy, and that criminal refusal to think a matter out which we call prejudice, all grow up in the human mind in such close connection with the sense of justice that it is often almost impossible to divide the one from the other. The workmen in the parable no doubt thought that they were actuated by a spirit of justice, but, as a matter of fact, they were simply moved by the spirit of envy. They did not ask whether the sum received was a sufficient remuneration for a day's labour, nor whether they could live on it. They had no reasonable ground whatever for thinking themselves underpaid, except the fact that someone else

was receiving a wage at a higher rate. Superficially the arrangement did not look fair, and they judged after appearances instead of judging righteous judgment. They used a moral rule-of-thumb, measured one man's fortune against another's, and refused to think. The elder brother, in the same way, was very unreasonable. He lost nothing by the feast which was made for the returned prodigal. He might have enjoyed it even, if he had not allowed jealousy to prey upon his sense of justice till they were so much entangled that he could not divide the one from the other.

When one thinks of the "sayings" we have quoted, it is necessary, we think, to remember that our Lord was a realist, and a realist is seldom a theorist. We cannot look on life exactly as it is, and not give some very great pain to very good people who have made for themselves a theory which explains life. No doubt the men who at the bottom of their hearts believed that Jehovah rewarded and punished in this life according to character were very much shocked to hear our Lord say that those on whom the Tower of Siloam fell were no worse than other people. They could not bear to think it was true, because it overthrew their pet theory and left them

mystified. There are many mysteries to which our Lord alluded, but which He did not explain. On many subjects he left men in the dark; and He never took any pains to spare the moral prejudices of His hearers. It is true that good people are more delighted when they see a real conversion—someone, that is, who has been saved from the error of his ways—than when they see ninety-nine good persons that need no repentance. It is strange, it is sometimes rather disheartening, that it should be so; but so it is. Again, it is a fact that we do, for all that cynics may say, love those best to whom we owe most. We continually hear someone say: "I should be an ungrateful brute indeed if I did not like So-and-so," and the person in question is no doubt ready to forgive the grateful person a good deal for the sake of his gratitude. It is a fact, and a fact which it must be sometimes morally useful to emphasize.

There can be no doubt, we think, that our Lord very much distrusted the retributive instinct, and much of His teaching was designed to set just men on their guard against it. A keen personal desire to "pay out" is not an integral part of a sense of justice

as Christ conceived it. If we allow it to make part of righteous judgment, we come straight back to the old perfectly natural and entirely pagan idea of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. While our Lord never said anything against the public administration of justice—He upheld the law in unequivocal terms, and paid without resistance a tax of whose imposition he disapproved —He allowed no one to take the law into his own hands, having regard, we suppose, to the fact that an injured person can hardly take an unprejudiced view of what has occurred. If ever there was an excusable instance of such an action, it was when Peter struck the high priest's servant and cut off his ear. For all these centuries all readers have liked Peter the better for the act; but our Lord, though we have no reason to suppose but that He may have agreed with us in sentiment, frustrated Peter's intention to inflict punishment, telling him not to have recourse to a violence which could only breed violence again. Occasionally, also, He recommended that faults should be entirely overlooked rather than that the man about to put justice in motion should thereby make himself a hypocrite in his own eyes. He

impressed this so intensely upon the minds of the censorious crowd of men longing to put the barbarous law of Moses in force, and stone the woman taken in adultery, that not one of them had the effrontery left to condemn her. Yet without doubt she was guilty, or the words, " Go, and sin no more," would have been meaningless. An exactly similar case is put before us when the servant is condemned who, having been forgiven by his lord, goes straight from his presence and takes his fellow-servant by the throat, saying: " Pay me that thou owest." The conclusion of the matter seems to be this,—that the natural sense of justice must be freed of revenge, of cruelty, and of self-interested and sentimental theorising before it can be safely relied upon; and if in the process a few guilty persons escape, society is better served by the self-discipline of the judging crowd than it could have been by looking on at the preventive warning of the most severe punishment.

CHAPTER XVI

"THE IMITATION OF CHRIST"

"THE Imitation of Christ" is admitted on all hands to be the finest embodiment of the monastic ideal. That ideal has, we should say, no hold upon the minds of modern Englishmen, yet no book of devotion, setting aside the Bible and the Prayer-book, is, we suppose, so widely read. Edition after edition issues from the press. "The Imitation" is the most often given of all religious gift-books, and the one most often recommended by spiritual pastors and masters to confirmation candidates. In fact, the possession, if not the perusal, of it may be said to form part of the religious education of the average Englishman of the better class. All this seems very strange when one considers that the writer is, before all things, a monk, a celibate, and an ascetic. He knows nothing of the world outside the monastery. Nevertheless, as he reveals himself in this most intimate of intimate books he has something to say to those who are in the world which, be they Roman Catholics or Protestants, be

their Creed long or short, they have for four hundred years desired to hear, and found to be to their edification.

The interest of "The Imitation" is purely religious. Unlike St. Augustine, Thomas à Kempis does not confess his sins to his readers, though he tells them of his aspirations and his inclinations, of the meditations which afforded him spiritual consolation, and the rules which regulated his conduct in the community. Apparently it is impossible to escape from the friction of life. Shut out by the highest monastic walls, we find it again self-generated within. "It is no small matter," he writes, "to dwell in community, or in a congregation, and to converse therein without complaint, and to persevere therein faithfully until death." Years ago, he tells us—writing in the beginning of the fifteenth century—the conventual life satisfied those who sought it more completely, and fervour was more common, but "now he is greatly accounted of, that breaketh not the rule, and that can with patience endure that which he hath professed." There are some, he says, "that neither are in peace themselves, nor suffer others to be in peace: they are troublesome to others, but," he adds with kindly

tolerance, "always more troublesome to themselves." Evidently the community, in his eyes, judged too much after appearances, and had lowered their earlier standard. "We ask how much one hath done: but how virtuous his actions are, is not so diligently considered. We inquire whether he be strong, rich, beautiful, handsome, a good writer, a good singer, or a good labourer: but how poor he is in spirit, how patient and meek, how devout and spiritual is seldom spoken of." This instinctive ascetic gives much counsel how best to live the monastic life, which seems to him the best worth living. "Never be altogether idle," he says, "but either reading or writing, or praying, or meditating, or labouring something of profit for the common good." Waste of time is one of the snares against which he warns his brethren with the most insistence. "If thou withdraw thy self from superfluous talk, and idle wandring about, as also from hearing of news and tales; thou shalt find sufficient, and fit time to think of good things." Much talking is, his readers are constantly assured, a source of spiritual danger. "The talk of worldly affairs hindreth very much, although they be recounted with sincere intention," is his stern conclusion.

9—(2450)

"Why do we so willingly speak, and talk one with another," he asks, "when notwithstanding we seldom return to silence, without hurt of conscience?" He thinks it is because we "desire to ease our mind over-wearied with sundry thoughts: and we talk willingly, and think of those things which we love best, and most desire; of those, which we feel most contrary unto us." In these days it is difficult to conceive wherein lay the sin of this natural wish for sympathy. Thomas à Kempis, however, dreaded all roads which led to friendship, and had, indeed, very little abstract belief in it. "A friend is rare to be found, that continueth faithful in his friend's distress," he declares. "A friend going from thee or dying shall not grieve thee," he writes. "Thou oughtest to be so dead to such affections of beloved friends, that (forasmuch as appertaineth unto thee) thou shouldst wish to be without all company of men." "Our Lord," he thinks, "bestoweth his blessings there, where he findeth his vessels empty." No doubt this fear of free talk and strong human feeling belonged to the conventional stand-point of monasticism; but we cannot help suspecting that it was intensified by the skinless sensitiveness which the

writer from time to time betrays. He regards "injurious words" as one of the heaviest of trials, and the desire to resent them as one of the greatest of temptations. Such sensitiveness he takes to be universal: "part of the ancient corruption of our nature." He is always reminding himself that it is foolish to dwell upon an unkind speech, for "what are words, but words?" and "Let not thy peace be in the tongues of men." Whenever he writes of nature and grace it is impossible not to imagine that he is confiding to us his personal struggles. As he treats of these opposite human tendencies he seldom mentions actual temptations to sin. His was not the temperament which inclines to any lawlessness; and it is pathetic to read of the sensitiveness he could not overcome, the attention he could not keep, the repugnances he could never root out, and the interest in things human and secular which he never learned wholly to thwart. "Nature seeketh to have those things that be curious and precious, abhorreth that which is mean and base: but Grace delighteth in plain and humble things, despiseth not coarse and mean, nor refuseth to wear that which is old and torn," he writes sadly, and the heart of the reader is moved

to defend the instinctive fastidiousness of the scholar against the onslaughts of a peevish and overwrought conscience. He regrets deeply that he is "so watchful to tales, so drowsy to watch in the service of God, so hasty to the end thereof." Perhaps it occurred to him sometimes that a man might be too strict even with himself, for we find him admitting that "those things that a man cannot amend in himself or in others, he ought to suffer patiently until God ordain otherwise"; and again: "I offer up also unto thee whatsoever is good in me, although it be very little."

The charm of such writing is patent. But why it is considered specially suited to young people at a moment when they are entering the lists of life we confess is not so clear. Thomas à Kempis has a horror of ambition, which he presents always upon its worst side, and describes as "gaping after honours"; a great fear of independence, which appears to him nothing but revolt; and a suspicion that all wish for happiness is evil. "Go whither thou wilt, thou shalt find no rest, but in humble subjection under the government of a Superior," he assures us; and "if there had been any better things, and more

profitable to the health of man than suffering, surely Christ would have shewed it by word, and example." Now few people desire to crush all ambition in the young, knowing from how many worse things it is likely to free them, and still fewer would wish them to "find rest" all their lives "under the government of a Superior." Again, most Christians firmly believe that Christ, both by word and example, worked daily and hourly to relieve the sufferings of men. How is it that, in spite of all these drawbacks, all this impracticability and loyal adherence to an ideal which, in this country at least, is dead, the words of Thomas à Kempis are, to use Matthew Arnold's expression, "true and living yet"? The unthinking will point to the title-page, and say: Because he shows us how to imitate Christ. But in all reverence for so great a book, we would ask: Is the "Master" who speaks to the disciple in the words of Thomas à Kempis the same whom the Evangelists have revealed to us? Honestly, we cannot help saying that He is not. Or to be less dogmatic, should we say that the figure of Christ as here displayed is so covered up in Church draperies as to be barely recognisable? How strange, how

entirely out of character, do these words sound in the mouth of our Lord: "I have bestowed all, and will have all to be returned to me again: and with great severity I require thanks." Again, in speaking of the saints: "They glory not of their own merits, for they ascribe no good unto themselves, but attribute all to me, who of my infinite charity have bestowed my blessings upon them. They are replenished with so great love of my Godhead."

In the belief of the present writer, the continued life of the book depends not on its ethical teaching—so far as that teaching belongs to itself, and is not common to every form of Christianity—nor on the picture which it offers of Christ. It depends upon the fact that Thomas à Kempis taught, and no one can read his book without learning that religion is not a dead science, a dogma to be learnt from books or accepted upon ecclesiastical authority, but something as vital to-day as in the time of the Psalmist or St. Paul. "I (saith our Lord) have taught the Prophets from the beginning, and cease not continually to speak to every one: but many are deaf," he writes. "Let all Doctors hold their peace; let all creatures be silent

in thy sight; speak thou alone unto me." He realised, to a degree impossible to most natures, the direct influence of God upon the human soul, and this is what every religious man of every creed desires to realise, and why he will read any book which can give him an exceptionally vivid account of such an experience, whether the writer be an Augustinian monk or a Bedford cobbler.

Thomas à Kempis heard a voice saying, "I teach without noise of words, without confusion of opinions, without ambition of honour, without contention of arguments." He had the perception of the supernatural which marks religious genius; and, however the religious world may doubt his peculiar theology and mistrust his cramped rule of life, they will always want to hear what he has to say. "He to whom the Eternal Word speaketh, is delivered from multitudes and diversities of opinions," he said; and the appeal of his book to men of every variety of creed and doubt is a sufficient proof of the truth of his words.

CHAPTER XVI

FACING LIFE

" If any spirit breathes within this round
Uncapable of weighty passion,
As from his birth being hugged in the arms
And nuzzled 'twixt the breasts of happiness,
Who winks and shuts his apprehensions up,
From common sense of what men were and are,
Who would not know what men must be—let such
Hurry amain from our black-visaged shows,
We shall affright their eyes. But if a breast
Nailed to the earth with grief, if any heart
Pierced through with anguish pant within this ring,
If there be any blood whose heat is choked
And stifled with true sense of misery,
If aught of these strains fill this consort up,
Th' arrive most welcome."

This is the splendid prologue to an Elizabethan play of no great merit (the second part of *Antonio and Melida*, by Marston). Charles Lamb speaks of " the tragic note of preparation which it sounds." It is, he says, " as solemn a preparation as the warning note which he who saw the Apocalypse heard cry." It reads like an introduction to the drama of life itself wherein the mature man must make up his mind whether he will face

the facts of life or whether he will not, whether he will keep his eyes, however "affrighted," upon the black-visaged shows" which cross the stage from time to time, or whether he will refuse to look. His moral rank must depend largely upon his decision. According to his choice, he becomes a free man or a captive,—a captive confined amid pleasant theories, or a citizen of the world able to go where he will, willing to touch the sharp edge of reality and to chance its wounds. A good many men put mental comfort before mental liberty, and enslave themselves. The men who dare not face the harder facts of life are, in Marston's eyes, as a rule the favourites of fortune; and, of course, the temptation to shirk them is greater to these than to its victims. It is so easy, for instance, for a successful man to believe that, roughly speaking, we all get our deserts. Fully assured that he has got his, he argues from his own experience. Looking upon failure, he says to himself: "So-and-so should have been more prompt [or less headlong]. He should have been more industrious [or he should have known when to take a holiday]. He ought to have known better than to have made this [that, or the other] mistake. He

should have been ready to risk [or he should have feared to adventure]. In fact, he has made his own bed, and he must lie on it." Thus "hugged in the arms of happiness," he refuses to see when circumstances trip up the man who should have run well. It is a sad sight: better to explain or to forget it.

Another false theory which hides an unpleasant truth is that which postulates that everything is a matter of habit, that nothing hurts much if only the person is used to it: that poverty and privation, ceaseless drudgery and care, incommode no one who has borne them long enough. They deny the existence of those the thought of whom saddens the men who can face the facts, and who are "desperate with too quick a sense of constant infelicity." No doubt the world would be a happier place without them. Why not, therefore, imagine them gone? A similar blind can be made out of the strange idea that in the long run lots are equal. This theory is in such plain contradiction of experience that it seems hardly possible that anyone should take pleasure in laying its unction to his soul. Yet it is not uncommon to find someone who says he believes it.

Nothing will argue him out of his preconceived notion. He falls back upon the theory of compensation, and as compensations comprise everything, from money to disposition, it is not easy to contradict him. So he does his sum made up of uncertain items, and proves by it that the world is just.

Another very amiable and entirely groundless view often maintained by those who are afraid to look upon truth is that nobody means to do wrong. They are ignorant, or stupid, or ill-judged, or thoughtless, or misled, but they never mean any harm. This is a pleasant imagination which can appeal, one would think, only to the entirely innocent or the essentially silly. We talk of "damning with faint praise." These are they who damn mankind with excuses, and would rank them morally below the animals rather than convict them of sin. No doubt in some sense these ostrich-like happiness-hunters attain their end. Yet few of those who determine to look at things as they are feel any envy towards them. Until he gets used to the play no man who keeps his eyes on the stage can avoid some very great shocks. Truth, it must be admitted, is often appalling, but only those who can endure these shocks

obtain glimpses of its unearthly beauty, or realise at moments that extraordinary correlation of opposites—of sin to virtue, order to confusion, doubt to faith—which harmonises in a flash and for the space of a second the contradictions of the world. Reality has some indescribable value for most of us. Who appraises his experience in exact ratio to its pleasurability? If in the next world a man were asked: "What of that which you saw there below will you keep in memory, and what will you cast into oblivion?" a good many "black-visaged shows" would be retained, we are sure. Oddly enough, it is not the people who turn from the truth who cling most to life. The interest is unspeakably enhanced by seeing the whole of the drama, and we should say that for most ordinary men and women the dramatic interest of life and its affections made up its desirability. A few there may be who love life merely as an opportunity for the accomplishment of an end, interested or disinterested, but we should say that they are few indeed.

But to return to Marston. He invites those whose souls are already "nailed to the earth with grief," who feel themselves "choked and stifled with the sense of misery,"

to look fearlessly upon the terrible scenes being enacted in the world around them. Surely these, at least, would have a right to seek what consolation they could by turning their eyes from sad facts so far as is for them possible. One would say so; and most of us, when we are called upon to endeavour to ease mental suffering, proceed upon the plan of screening off all of horror which the sufferer has not yet seen. All the same, we believe there is wisdom of a very deep kind in Marston's words. For all suffering but that which is entirely physical the world seeks explanation rather than consolation,—or should we say: it seeks consolation chiefly in explanation? But do the more terrible acts of life's drama offer any explanation of its problems? Hardly; but we think that some of them prove that there is an explanation. Those who turn from tragic truth never know that there are minds which are a match for fate, and realise that to them the explanation has been given,—"not," as St. Paul said, "in word, but in power." They do not know anything which they can tell us by argument or persuasion, but their sufferings produce for them no impotent rebellion, no confusion of despair. They are not many in number,

but they belong to all classes and all shades of religious opinions, and there are scholars among them and men without learning. They seem to be singled out for suffering. But the reason of what seems to onlookers like the wanton malice of fate is ever present to their souls ; not to their minds,—if it were, they might impart the secret, and that is not permitted. They are the recipients of a divine confidence they cannot betray, but which for them clears up the mystery of pain, and transforms a scene of chaotic cruelty into a vision of the divine order. Such men stand upon the summit of life. We dare not desire to see the things that they see ; the ascent is too terrible. But those who watch even from very far off give thanks that the humiliation is taken out of suffering, and learn at least to suspect the divine origin of the indomitable spirit of man, which all the terrors of time do not avail to quench.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE VITAL SPARK IN CHRISTIANITY

WHERE lies the vital spark in Christianity? In dogma or in ethics, in worship or in charity? It is impossible to say, just as it is impossible to tell the precise position of the soul in the human body, or the place of God in the order of Nature. All the Christian systems produce saints, and all show a capacity of revival. Christianity may be apparently extinguished under a weight of extraneous formulæ and ceremonies, or lost in nebulous clouds of mysticism. Christendom may appear to forget morality in favour of religious conviction. Again, religious conviction may be accounted of no importance as against righteousness and alms-deeds. Yet Christianity does not die. The cold aspersions of science may seem at times in a fair way to quench the spark; the still more redoubtable acids of secularism may appear to have turned it to cold ash; yet it revives and shines. Again and again the people that sat in darkness have seen a great light. All the while, even when the spark burns lowest, characters are

produced of a kind which Christianity alone creates. Differences of doctrine are innumerable. There is not a dogma of the Christian creed which has not been canvassed, hardly one which has not been separately denied, by men who have lived in accordance with the Christian ideal and died in the Christian hope. There is not a Commandment which has not been violated by crowds who have been kept from mere animalism by veneration for the Christian symbols and the emotions of Christian penitence.

There have been times of great worldly success when the Church, mad with power, has effectually shaded the Light of the World; when she has used her knowledge of things human and divine to help her to gratify her insatiable ambition; when she has hindered those who would enter the Palace of Wisdom, and offered them a symbol or a picture to turn their thoughts; when, playing on the pangs of a divinely inspired penitence, she has compelled men's conscience that she might curtail their liberty, and, declaring her own monopoly of the free gift of absolution, has dealt out the mercy of Christ to those only who would submit to her catechisms. Her ambition has not stopped short of craft.

She has deluged with heretical blood the miraculous spark which cannot be extinguished, and fearing openly to disobey the precepts of Him who ignited it, has handed her enemies to the arm of the civil law that they might " receive the last offices of mercy " at the stake or at the hands of the torturer. All this while, how many of her children, how many even of her instruments, have perceived the gleaming and burning of the light, and have perceived little else? To them the symbol of mother and child has been no idol, as hasty reformers have imagined it, but the picture of purity and love of all that is best and kindest in the mixed heart of man. To such the crucifix was no mere effigy of wood or stone, but the expression and reminder of the love of a God who, while he had never explained, had, as they thought, willingly shared the suffering life of His people. These men received forgiveness, through whatever channel, and proclaimed it none the worse for a vainly imagined share in the work of the spirit. The ceremonies by which the Church encircled their lives were to them no disciplinary forms, but the sheltering walls of a fold which shielded them from the cold blasts of uncertainty and the

outer darkness of a faithless confusion. At the worst of times the Christianity of Christ was not without many witnesses, and at the moment of greatest corruption someone has always arisen to cleanse the Temple. The advent of St. Francis is like a scene in the Gospel. The Disciples disputed among themselves who should be greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Christendom—Christendom in germ—talked of ambition. Christ " called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them." The Church, grown powerful and mercenary, minded earthly things. St. Francis, with his songs and his animals, his childlike charm and childlike imagination, his childlike courage and innocence, won Churchmen away from their sordid cares. Later on, Luther, a strong man, full of faults, yet baptised not only with the sacred water from ecclesiastical fonts but " with the Holy Ghost and with fire," defended the Christian faith against the combined armies of superstition and scepticism.

The revival reformed the Roman, while it created the Protestant, branch of the Christian Church, for reformation filters through creed to character, often leaving the former not essentially changed.

The weapons of freedom were, however, turned before long to the defence of bondage. A Roman Cardinal charged Protestantism, not wholly without excuse, with a new form of idolatry,—" the slavish worship of a book." Luther criticised the Scriptures pretty freely, and made his own modification of the Canon ; but later Protestantism has more than once obscured the Christian light by setting the law of Moses upon a level with the commands of Christ. Puritanism, for all its splendid history, has some dark hours to deplore wherein Jehovah was adored rather than " the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ." Once more the shades are removed, not this time by a saint or a prophet, but by an army of intellectual workmen—the Biblical scholars of the last century—who have again accentuated the varying values of the revelation through literature, and again taken the light from under the bushel, and set it, despite the shrieks of " the fearful and unbelievers," where it might give light to the world, since when it has illuminated many dark places, full of the habitations of cruelty.

The danger of all liberty is that it should become licence. Freed from the bonds of the letter and the terrors of the priesthood,

certain Christians are in danger of smothering the vital spark under masses of copy-book maxims, so convinced are they that there is but one panacea for all the evils into which the flesh and the Devil may lead mankind, and that is didactic precept. Christianity, as preached by certain Rationalists, looks as if it might go the way of the Stoic philosophy. For our own part, we do not believe that even in this form it will. The ethical teaching of Christ and the ethical teaching of Marcus Aurelius show a marked resemblance as to feature. The difference between them is this: the one is dead and the other living. In the words of the Emperor there is no moral motive force. We should say that since they were spoken no sinner was ever converted from the error of his ways by reading or hearing them, though good men may have been further perfected. On the other hand, the ethics of Christ are "quick and powerful," and shining through even the dullest medium of didacticism, they reveal the meaning of remorse, and show us something of value in human nature which by the light of justice must be for ever overlooked.

Befogged in the mazes of introspection, the Christian light has had at times but a small

orbit of radiation. Yet among the most esoteric circles of Christian mysticism there have never wanted some who groped after good deeds and found light enough at last to lead them out of themselves. A part, perhaps the greater part, of all that the Churches have taught seems in the light of modern criticism to be the commandment of men, the intellectual development of their theories, the metaphorical utterances of their hopes and fears. All the same, there is, we believe, among every sincere community of Christians, however in their mistaken ardour they may condemn each other, something else. To divide between direct inspiration and its human, and consequently more or less limited and erroneous, expression is impossible. " We have this treasure in earthen vessels " :—

" Draw, if thou canst, the mystic line
Severing rightly His from thine,—
Which is human ? which Divine ?"—*Emerson.*

CHAPTER XIX

THE INSTINCT OF PRAYER

BELIEF in prayer is an instinct, an instinct which neither argument nor disappointment is able to eradicate. The great majority of men pray if they find themselves in sufficiently acute distress, and that without regard to what we call their religious opinions. But if occasional prayer is a spiritual instinct, it is no less certain that habitual prayer is a spiritual effort. When the Disciples of our Lord said to Him, "Teach us to pray," there is no doubt that they were referring to the habit of prayer, which they found difficult and perhaps burdensome. Those who desire to be delivered from some sudden pain or peril do not ask to have words found for them in which they may express themselves, and the diurnal suggestion contained in the Lord's Prayer makes it evident that it was intended to serve as a pattern to those who wanted to put more vitality into their accustomed devotions. In reply to this request Christ, who sought to give men rest unto their souls, made no heavy demands upon the powers of worship of those whom He taught, realising, no doubt, how exceedingly different those

powers are. The form He offered them as a pattern of what prayer should be is very short and comprehensive. There is no value, He explains, in vain repetition, and no one is heard for his much speaking, neither is any great effort after expression necessary, since "your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." Times and seasons of prayer He leaves entirely to the individual conscience, only urging each man to maintain privacy in his personal devotions so far as he can, on the ground that it preserves sincerity.

All this teaching coincides exactly with the modern religious spirit; but this is not all that our Lord said on the subject of prayer. Whatever allowance we may make for metaphorical language, it cannot be denied that He asserted that all prayers made in a Christian spirit are answered, and that He reiterated the assertion with startling plainness: "Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." It is not very easy to see what He meant. One meaning must obviously be set aside. The most spiritual teacher whom the world has ever seen did not offer to His Disciples the wishing-cap of a children's

tale. However the words, as they have come down to us, may appear to bear the interpretation that all who pray can get what they want, that is certainly not how they were understood by those who heard them. No set of men ever more cheerfully went without than did the Apostles of Christ, and on none was the necessity for abnegation more firmly impressed. And yet they all believed in prayer. They could not disbelieve in it without throwing over Christ's teaching altogether, and St. Paul's faith was not in the least shaken by his failure to obtain the removal of that "thorn in the flesh" which so greatly distressed him. The men to whom Christ spoke must constantly have prayed, as they felt, to no purpose, and it was, as we imagine, to remove this source of discouragement that our Lord set Himself. He wanted to impress upon them "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." It is characteristic of Him that He almost never said the obvious thing, or told men that which went without saying. It would have been meaningless to say to those who had all their lives been harassed by the knowledge, that prayer would not always bring the fulfilment of a wish. In the same

way, Christ told those who believed His teaching that they should never die, but should live for ever. He was not denying the physical fact of a physical death, which all saw happening around them, but proclaiming as emphatically as possible the spiritual fact of a spiritual life. Accordingly He says to them : " Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." He tells them that the power of prayer is unlimited, and that it may accomplish the seemingly impossible, and remove even mountains,—*i.e.*, difficulties which appear, like the hills round Jerusalem, " to stand fast for ever."

Are we, then, to suppose that our Lord meant us never to pray for a temporal blessing ? That seems to us to be an impossible solution in the face of the facts. He suggested to all men to pray every day for the means of livelihood, and His followers, by their own account, prayed for temporal blessings. Our Lord Himself—with the reservation of complete obedience to God's will—prayed fervently that the doom He

foresaw might be averted. Again, it is almost impossible to distinguish between spiritual and temporal benefits, so complex is the world we live in. Most men in the present day simply could not pray for what seems to them a miracle. When the doctor tells us that life is extinct we have not the power to pray that that life may return to the body; but who can tell how many calamities may have been avoided by a spiritual suggestion? To deny that instances of answers to prayer have occurred is, in the opinion of the present writer at least, to shut one's eyes to evidence.

The explanation of the whole matter which commends itself to our mind is this,—that prayer is a beneficent force to which our instinct bears witness. That which we so dimly realise, our Lord, with His infinitely greater spiritual sensitiveness, clearly saw, —so clearly that He could hardly find words strong enough to express His meaning, or to impress it upon the minds of His followers. He speaks as though those who pray put in motion some force whose working is as certain as that of any law of Nature, and He teaches this as part of the Christian faith. But exactly how that law works we do not know,

and He did not explain. Why He did not every man must decide for himself in accordance with the dogmatic medium through which he is able to receive the Christian verity. There are some people who get out of all these difficulties by piously begging the question. They say that all who pray in Christ's name should pray that God's will may be done more fervently than they pray for what they want, and that then they must obtain one or other of their petitions. But though our Lord certainly taught men to try to resign themselves to the will of God, and did resign Himself, we cannot believe that He taught what seems to us of the nature of a pious quibble. Many—we might say most—good people never succeed in completely giving up their wills to God. Are we to say that such have never prayed in the spirit of Christ? We cannot help thinking that when Christ said "in my name" He meant something far simpler than this somewhat Jesuitical advice. The one condition which He insisted on a man's complying with before he could put in motion the power of prayer was benevolence. He must "forgive" if he had "aught against any." He must bring his mind into harmony with the

mind of God, not necessarily by emptying it of all desire, but by strenuously endeavouring to have a good will towards all men. He must not pray against his enemies.

That we may one day understand the law we have been discussing far better than we do at present seems to us to be well within the bounds of spiritual possibility. Certain glimpses of its operation, even when the actual petition has been refused, have been vouchsafed to us from the beginning. St. Paul was not the only man who has found sufficient grace to bear an infirmity. Instances must occur to every open mind of similar occurrences. Truthful men, whose evidence would be accepted on any other subject, have declared all through the ages that by prayer they have been delivered from the terror of approaching calamities, both great and small, from death downwards. Nevertheless, few would dare to say that all who have thus prayed have been thus delivered. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," said St. James; and it seems to us that there is sufficient evidence, both actual and intuitional, to uphold him; but in these days we cannot any longer particularise and presume to say how, why, or when.

CHAPTER XX

COMPASSION

WHAT is the essential difference between good people and bad? Many students of human nature would reply in the present day that there is no essential distinction. This conclusion, however, is not in accordance with the teaching of Christ. Between the one and the other He drew a startlingly sharp line; but He did not draw it where the Pharisees thought that it ought to be drawn, and He continually shocked their sensibilities by associating with those whose society they scrupulously avoided. Nevertheless, He drew a distinction, and drew it so severely that we can only hope and believe that His words were according to the custom of His speech,—metaphorical. The part of the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, which is called in the "heading" "A description of the last judgment," would appear from its context—coming, as its does, immediately after the story of the talents, which it resembles in some details—to be a parable. But even granting so much, the imagery is very slight

and transparent. The speaker's personality shows continually, and His words are too full of meaning and emotion not to break at times through the frail medium of fiction in which they were offered to the world. Our Lord begins by speaking openly of Himself. Then He takes up His parable. His hearers are to imagine Him a King before whom stand all the nations of the world awaiting his judgment. He separates them "one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." He sets the good on his right hand, and the evil on his left, and he begins to sum up the case for the one and against the other. The virtue which justifies the righteous is compassion; the vice which condemns the guilty is callousness. Turning to the righteous, he says that he was hungry, sick, a stranger, and a prisoner, and that they showed him compassion; he turns to the wicked, and tells them that in like case they showed him none. Both bad and good are greatly surprised by the verdict. The righteous, conscience-stricken by what they think undeserved praise, hasten to declare that they were not consciously serving Christ. The judge tells them they need not distress their

consciences; they acted out of kindness to men, and for the Son of man that is enough. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." The guilty excuse themselves. Had they known that the sufferer they neglected was our Lord they would have helped Him, they plead. They are answered in like manner. Failure to recognise Christ is here held to be no fault. It is also held to be no excuse.

However little literal may be our interpretation of this part of the Evangelist's narrative, we cannot, if we allow it any meaning at all, make it mean less than two things. First, that in passing a final judgment on any man's character the crucial question is the question of his practical, not of his theoretic, Christianity. Was he kind, or was he careless? Was he of use to his fellow-creatures, or was he of none? Secondly, that they mistake their Master who represent Him as punctilious of technical deference, careful about His title of Lord rather than about the keeping of His commandments. Neither of these points, we venture to think, has been sufficiently emphasised by the Churches. They have been interested, not in the verdict,

but in the sentence, not in the moral, but in the story.

The whole passage looks as though the virtue of compassion held a pre-eminent place in the mind of Christ, a fact which goes far to reconcile the moral ideal of the twentieth century with the moral ideal of the first, and suggests that while religious people are deeply lamenting the decay of dogma, and beginning to fear the disappearance of the detailed creeds which represent the theoretical theology of centuries, they may all the while be in reality living in the presence of a great Christian revival. During the ages of faith, which were above all things the ages of theory, Compassion lost caste among the virtues, and is only now regaining her prestige. Even in the present day many stern moralists look askance upon what they call the modern passion of pity. Justice and good sense, they say, are too often sacrificed upon its altar. Christianity herself, they would have us believe, is in danger from her own handmaid; spirituality is forgotten in philanthropy; the claims of faith are lost sight of in the claims of fellowship. We think this refusal—as it seems to us—to recognise the signs of the times is attributable

to the want of wisdom and courage showed by the exponents of the new phase of religion. Among the voices which give vent to any great wave of feeling many are of inferior quality, and changes in religion have always been indissolubly connected with searchings of heart and the gradual dissolving of ancient forms of faith. A great many truly compassionate natures are terribly weakened by an undue sense of the pain of life, which, when all is said, bears but a small proportion to the pleasure of it. They do their best to alleviate the suffering they see, but inwardly they are too often in a state of terror and revolt. For such malcontent Christians the central doctrine of their creed, that God is love, is constantly slipping from their grasp. The voice of revelation, which proclaims its truth in their hearts, is not loud enough to drown the negative roar of inexplicably cruel circumstance. They cannot bring themselves to make that great act of faith which consists in realising the fact that the origin of evil has been for ever unknown, and the problem of pain insoluble; and they waste an energy which might be used for increasing the sum of the world's happiness by kicking against the eternal pricks. Can it

be pretended, under cover of any parable, that the root of the matter is in such as these, that the shelter of Christ's sympathy, which is still to many outside the Churches as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, is thrown over them? We think the Gospel is full of signs that it is. Our Lord's description of His own mission—"He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised"—and His injunctions to those whom he sent upon missionary work all imply the paramount duty of compassion, and suggest that He recognised the power of money to hinder the acceptance of His teaching. Besides all this, we have those terrible words spoken upon the Cross, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which, but for the suggestion of sympathy they contain for such as feel the discipline of life too hard for them, could be nothing but a source of doubt and confusion to the most or the least orthodox reader. His attitude is not that of St. Paul, who has little patience with those who break their hearts because they cannot justify the ways of God to men. Paul argues without hesitation that God's will is never to be questioned,

and carries his argument to its logical conclusion: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." For those who tremble before the rod of this dogma he has only an eloquent rebuke: "O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay?"

One reason which seems to explain the high place of compassion in the Christian hierarchy of qualities is the fact that without it almost all the virtues lose their social value. The aim of the society of Christ's followers is the improvement of the world. "The kingdom of heaven," we are told, "is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." If Christianity were a system destined purely for the salvation of the individual soul, if Christ had said nothing more than "He that loseth his life shall save it," then the place which He ascribes to compassion would be disproportionate. Compassion alone can save the character of a high-minded man from the dry-rot of disgust. It is this disgust which has narrowed

the Churches, and which has made the ordinary Christian ideal half conventual instead of wholly social. The better a man is by nature, the more fortunate and innocent his surroundings in youth, the greater his power to persevere in the right way, the more easily does he fall a prey to this parasitic vice, till, finally, he becomes simply an illustration of Matthew Arnold's hopeless words :—

> "The soul mounting higher to God, comes no nigher,
> But the arch fiend Pride mounts at her side."

Without compassion the salt of the earth lose their power to preserve, and are henceforth "good for nothing." Surely the marvellous spread of this distinctively Christian virtue is a comfortable fact to set against the alarming increase of spiritual dismay engendered by doubt. May it not foreshadow a time when the Christ of the Churches shall become the Christ of the crowd, who "called his disciples unto him and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude" ?

CHAPTER XXI

CHRISTIANITY AND ANXIETY

IT is a generally received opinion among religious people that the Gospel deals with no subjects outside faith and morals. In a sense, of course, this theory is true enough, but that our Lord concerned Himself constantly both with health and happiness is true also none the less. By crushing the whole of His teaching into two moulds and labelling it all under two heads we turn many healing words into reproofs and many a sentence of encouragement into a goad. The greater number of those who sought the help of Christ came to Him as a physician, and it was by cures that His fame was spread. That our Lord spoke words of consolation to those in real trouble, to the bereaved, the sick, the oppressed, and the desperately poor is, of course, a fact admitted by all; but it was not only unhappiness in its acute form that appealed to Him, but unhappiness in its chronic form, a form which has often very little to do either with sorrow or circumstances, but which civilised man forges

for himself in the recesses of his imagination. Christianity aims at easing the anxious mind as well as offering consolation to those in actual affliction, and much of our Lord's most characteristic teaching is directed to the relief of care.

It is often said by those who are concerned to make Christianity out to be impracticable that Christ condemned forethought. "Take no thought for the morrow," they quote, disregarding the correction of the Revised Version, "Be not anxious for the morrow." These critics, while they utterly condemn the systems of the old theologians, who endeavoured to prove complicated theological problems by reference to a single text, have yet adopted their method. No one who reads the Gospel as a whole can maintain that Christ condemned forethought. Who, He asked, would be so foolish as to build a tower without counting the cost? What general would be so blind as to lead his army to certain defeat? In a yet more serious vein He laments the heedlessness and want of common prudence in the five virgins who failed of their purpose through refusing to look forward, and the man who knowing that his employer was "a hard man" and acted

as though he were easy-going, finds no excuse upon the lips of Christ. Had our Lord condemned forethought He would, apart from all considerations of expediency and morality, have taken much happiness out of life. All work necessitates more or less forethought. The pleasure of planning is no doubt a very great pleasure, exercising as it does the powers of imagination, and counteracting, through the imagination, the leakage of energy produced by too vivid a realisation of the darkness which confronts us all. What our Lord really deprecates is worry,—the ceaseless and fruitless calculation of chances which overwhelming material ambition and imaginative apprehension alike bring forth. The mind thus overworked leans almost always to egoism and to melancholy. The present that is known takes a less and less proportion in the face of the future that is feared, and gradually all hope of happiness fades out of life.

Our Lord, in His character of spiritual physician, advises men how to defend themselves against the disease of anxiety, from whatever cause arising, and suggests remedies to those who have already fallen victims to this most insidious and painful complaint.

He calls experience to witness that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions, and He argues that for those who believe in a good God it is wholly illogical to regard themselves as drifting among nameless dangers. If we would be at peace, He said, we must be content to lose in the race for luxury, and we must not cultivate "a doubtful mind." It is characteristic of our Lord's teaching that He never said one word to discourage the search for truth, nor against the nobler ambitions whose fruition His parables suggest may not be over at death. A desire for benevolent power He seems to have regarded as a desire belonging to the eternal side of man's nature; but for that worldly ambition which He summarised as a perpetual distress of mind consequent upon the consideration of food and clothes, He has nothing but condemnation. Such a state of distress is, He said, altogether unworthy of a religious man. The Gentiles sought after such things—the Romans, that is, whose spirituality was so much less developed than that of the Jews—but whoever would obtain peace should resolutely keep the just proportions of life in mind, should let great considerations have the first place, should seek first

the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and regard smaller things as additional, not essential.

It is, of course, indisputable that "a doubtful mind" is far harder to regulate than an ambitious one. That state of mind in which, as Matthew Arnold said, "Wise men are not strong," is one seldom cured. The disease permeates the whole nature, shakes all conviction, and destroys the power of decision. The wish becomes father to the doubt, and a man's best aspirations engender nothing but fear. The very intensity of his desire for a religion makes its greatest promises at times incredible to him. In the old days such men feared hell; nowadays they fear annihilation. In the old days they believed themselves the subjects of God's wrath, now they faint under a sense of the divine indifference. In every department of life doubt makes itself felt. The future is ever before their eyes, painted in a fantastic medium which allows that two mutually destructive misfortunes should happen at once. Like worldly men they lose all true sense of relative values, and their judgment, no less than their peace, is impaired. To those who are weary and heavy laden by this

kind of anxiety our Lord suggests several palliatives, knowing that the radical cures of faith and an absolute resolution to eschew worldly success are not suddenly possible. Nothing fixes a man's mind upon present peace, nothing counteracts the tendency to project thought into the future so surely as a real pleasure in Nature. We must, Christ counsels us, try to bring ourselves within the spell of her influence that we may learn something of her calm, and we must resolve to take short views of life, for anxiety cannot be forestalled.

As we consider the teaching of Christ as it concerns happiness, we cannot but be struck with the wonderful sanity of the whole, and its absolute coincidence with human experience. Happiness, He teaches, cannot be attained if it is made the chief end of life, and this is patent to the reason, for happiness consists rather in the restraint than in the gratification of the inclinations. We long when we are injured for revenge, but nothing destroys happiness so surely as rancour and remorse. Even hope is often a matter of self-control. It would be easier at times to yield to the fatal allurements of despair, but that way madness lies. We long for an

absolute system of religious observance, yet such a system makes for superstition, and binds men with burdens grievous to be borne. Fierce animal passions, and the greed which men have superadded thereto, bring with them their own condemnation,—a condemnation to unhappiness. All these things tend to unsoundness of mind, and, without doubt, ceaseless consideration of petty matters and constant indulgence in fear bring with them also a certain weakening of the mental fibre. Surely the greatest sceptic must admit that if any man could really accept the teaching of Christ in his practical life it would make him what Bacon called " a full man."

But is anxiety ever wholly cured ? Has anyone ever seen this radical change in disposition ? We should say not. But dispositions can be modified. After all, Christ did not offer to free His followers from the pains incident upon their physical or their mental constitutions, but only to ease and lighten their burdens, to give them refreshment and a rest to their souls.

CHAPTER XXII

A JUDGE AND A DIVIDER

THAT Christ claimed authority for His teaching—the highest possible, the highest thinkable authority—is patent to every rational reader of the New Testament. On the other hand, in several matters of moment He either tacitly or explicitly disclaimed authority for Himself, and, strangely enough, it was precisely that form of authority which controversialists have been most forward in claiming for Him. He left no formula by which correct belief could be tested, though He gave to His Disciples a form by which they might direct their aspirations. He refused to define the limits of the power of the State, though He implied that it had limits when it clashed with the service of God; and He deliberately threw the whole responsibility of a dispute about property on to the disputants, exclaiming: "Who made me a judge or a divider over you?" On all these scores ecclesiasticism has controverted Christ. In His name ecclesiastics burned heretics for refusing to subscribe to

a form of words; in His name they imposed political opinions, making partisanship part and parcel of piety; in His name they regulated the rights of property, denying them to the individual "religious" as something incompatible with the highest life, pushing them to the last point for the ecclesiastical community as necessary to the maintenance of Church power, granting them to the individual layman lest an over-high ideal should hinder the commerce of the world. In all these things they have made our Lord a judge, and in all these things He refused to give judgment.

But it is easy to throw stones at the Roman Church. Protestants cannot well boast that in these matters they have taken Christ at His word. A species of religious persecution lingered long; old tests were replaced by new ones hardly less drastic; and the reformed religion, inspired at first by the thought of a free conscience, was in danger of being narrowed and reduced to a mere plan of salvation. Protestantism upheld the interests of the respectable, and identified respectability with a competence. In its predilection for the man who had no thought of dividing his inheritance, it ran the risk

of forgetting the man who had no inheritance to divide.

Something like another Reformation has taken place. Persecution is gone. The anathemas of a past orthodoxy are obsolete. Most men admit that it is futile to look for political bias in the earliest records of a universal religion. The Churches lament their passing phase of worldliness, and turn in pity towards the poor. Once more comes the demand for a judgment. "Speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me," cry the multitude. Has the Church strength to answer according to the example of her Master: "In such a matter I have no judgment to give"? On her strength to refuse judgment depends her spiritual prosperity. It is only by admitting the disclaimers of Christ that she can make His claim good.

The most miraculous thing about the religion of Christ is that, as He taught it, Christianity takes into consideration, as no other religion has done, the unceasing change of circumstance which must nullify the efficacy of every schedule of rules, however minute, and dogmas, however ably worded, laid down for the guidance of man, but

which is powerless to destroy the dynamic force of certain moral and religious principles. All vital moral and religious teaching is parabolic rather than axiomatic. Few people now doubt that both in the region of ethics and of religion an irresistible force is always pushing on to further development. What good men did once only bad men do now, and what good men do to-day none but bad men may do to-morrow. Yet no man can get beyond the guidance of Christ. His demand is limitless. That a man should put himself in his brother's place means to-day a very different thing from that which it meant little more than a century ago. The prisons and lunatic asylums, the child-worked factories and filthy hospitals of the past are sufficient illustration of this fact. That a man should put himself in his brother's place may mean a hundred years hence, when his imaginative sympathy is still more fully developed, a very different thing from that which it means to-day, and we may well stand aghast at the sacrifices which Christ's method may demand in the future. We have only just ceased to think of God as a respecter of persons upon Whom the sufferings of the rich and the poor make a somewhat

different impression, and of heaven as a place to which the rich attain by kindness and the poor by gratitude. Our Lord warned us that our ideas of heaven and earth would change, but His words, His methods of facing life, remain sufficient for all time. Yet we may obey Christ and come to widely divergent conclusions about matters social. We may make the utmost effort to do as we would be done by, and yet not do all alike. One man is inflamed by hope. By risk alone, he thinks, can we escape stagnation. Another is restrained by experience. Only when we work by the light of the past, he believes, do we insure ourselves against calamity. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord." As to which course of action is the most desirable Christ did not decide. He left us no test whereby we may commend or condemn every item of our neighbour's public conduct, and none which will relieve us from occasional perplexity about our own.

It can hardly be doubted that new forms of worship, new epitomes of belief, new theories of theology, will spring up to comfort and strengthen the human heart as we

advance farther and farther into the truth. Different summaries will appeal simultaneously to equally Christian men and women. But so long as they conceive the Deity as fulfilling their highest ideal, and cleave to that ideal with their whole mind and heart and soul and strength, they will fulfil the command of Christ. Which religious system is best? We must decide by results. There is no rule-of-thumb. By their fruits we shall know them. In which mountain shall we worship? Christ refused to consider such a question. It is this eternal element in Christ's teaching which explains the limitlessness of its moral demand. Had He not pushed, as He did push in the Sermon on the Mount, every virtue to the vanishing-point, had He not demanded of His followers limitless forgiveness, untiring generosity, mercy without measure, truth without afterthought, faith to remove mountains, endurance till the end, He could not have called into play the whole moral and spiritual ambition, not only of the men to whom He spoke, but of all men for ever. No system which absolves men from the duty of thinking can ever be profitable to them, can ever make them into full men. It may save them

from much pain,—and so may paralysis. No doubt it satisfies a craving which exists in the human mind, but it is a craving for stupor—like that which lends attraction to narcotics—not the craving Christ sought to stimulate for more abundant life. It is self-control, not obedience, which is the moral goal of man. No teacher who tried to cross the purpose of evolution could ever be rightly regarded as divine. In Christ's renunciation of authority lies His divine authority. His spirit is the spirit which leads us to the light by the hard path of liberty, and to that spirit He sacrificed the exercise of a lordship such as He warned His Disciples to avoid. The spirit of truth coming forth from God was, He said, alone sufficient to guide the world, and as He meditated upon that "power from on high" He was able to say: "It is expedient for you that I go away."

CHAPTER XXIII

GODLINESS AND GRAVITY

THE Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles has been disputed, and defended, by great authorities,—disputed on the ground that the Church conditions alluded to in the letters to Timothy and Titus are such as could not have grown up during the lifetime of St. Paul, and defended because, to use Jowett's words, "there are passages in those Epistles which breathe the very life and spirit of the Apostle." Having regard to the cogency of the arguments on both sides, many Biblical scholars, including Renan, and perhaps Jowett, have satisfied their doubts and their convictions about the matter by a theory of interpolation. At present the trend of Biblical criticism is towards conservatism. Scholars of great weight give the Pastoral Epistles back to St. Paul, maintaining that our slender knowledge of the Apostolic age, wherein institutions grew rapidly and "opinions were like meteors," forbids the historian to deny that the state of things in Ephesus between 60 and 70 A.D. may have

been such as the writer of the Epistles implies.

If comes to this, then. The scholars have given the ordinary reader leave to use his own judgment, and, using it, he can hardly refrain from summing up for the Apostolic authorship. It was surely St. Paul—and no forger of his personality—who, looking forward to his death and backwards upon his life, declared that he had "fought the good fight" and "kept the faith," and who bitterly lamented the desertion of his friends in the same breath that he ardently rejoiced in the companionship of Christ. It was surely he who fulminated against Alexander the coppersmith, who had done him much injury, and blessed Onesiphorus, who "oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain." It is difficult to think it was another than St. Paul who in the first chapter of the First Epistle to Timothy rebuked the workers of iniquity with all the minatory force of a clear conscience, and yet exalted to the heavens the long-suffering of God, Who had chosen the "chief of sinners" to convert the Gentiles in illustration of His boundless power to forgive, and who, while he defended sound doctrine with all his heart, admitted that when

all arguments are over "the end of the commandment is charity." The light which flashes again and again from the recurrent clash of St. Paul's antitheses reveals his personality. If we admit that he wrote the Pastoral Epistles within sight of "the time of his departure," they are of intense interest for the picture they give of St. Paul's mind in his last years, and of the ideals, both ethical and doctrinal, of the Church at that moment when the prospects of Christianity were not bright, when so many had "turned aside," and when, though faith was at a low ebb, an insidious wave of superstition prevented men from consenting "to sound words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ." No one, we think, could read the Pastoral Epistles through in an unbiassed mood and not be struck by the austerity of their moral stand-point and the simplicity, and what would now be called the extreme breadth, of their dogmatic teaching.

When St. Paul sent his suffragan, Timothy, to preach a reformation in the Church at Ephesus, to bring his converts back to the pure worship of "the King eternal, incorruptible, invisible, the only God," and to turn them from "old wives' fables," and from

" doting about questionings and disputes of words," he made no impassioned appeal either to the emotions or to the intellect of those whom he desires to instruct. " Charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience," are, he says, essential parts of the Christian religion, and those who forget this " make shipwreck concerning the faith," and become mere sources of " wrath and disputing." The polemical and revolutionary tendencies which he hears of in the Church at Ephesus alike distress him. The purity of the faith must be maintained, and submission made to pagan authority in all things lawful. At the same time, he will allow of no compromise with pagan ideals. In these Epistles St. Paul carries the duty of submission to law very far indeed. The powers that be are not to be spoken against, and slaves are to be warned not to despise Christian masters " because they are brethren," but to show them " all good fidelity," for it is their duty to " adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour," and not cause it to be spoken against as subversive of order. The Church is everywhere to pray for all in high places, making intercession and giving thanks for rulers of every description, and not forgetting that the

Church is but part of a larger community, " that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour ; who willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." Against this " gravity " of mind St. Paul believes that the women of the Christian community at Ephesus are militating. They are, he hears, becoming worldly, and he desires that their too great influence should be suppressed, and deprecates the extreme conspicuousness of their attitude in all Church affairs. He is hot about the matter, and does not, as in a former Epistle, remind his readers that his attitude towards women has no warrant from Christ. Yet, stern as is his view of " how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God," he has yet no leaning at all towards asceticism, and no patience with those who are " forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving." He makes a curious criticism upon these fanatics, declaring that those whose sense of right and wrong is thus perverted have, as a rule, a conscience " branded " as " with a

hot iron." All officers of the Church are to be chosen for their blameless and temperate lives. They are to be sober men, the husband of one wife, and to "have good testimony from them that are without," not money-loving, "no brawlers," and "no strikers." It is evident all through this Epistle that St. Paul regarded belief in a future life not only as an essential part of Christian doctrine, but as a part having an intimate effect upon conduct, making men serious and conscientious as well as religious. He condemns the doctrine of those who say that "the resurrection is past already," and fears its moral effect, but he does not deduce from the "sound doctrine" of the future life any weapon to produce fear. Christ, he maintains "abolished death," and those who believe in His teaching have their "hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe."

But even more than he fears superstition, or argumentation, or lawlessness, the Apostle, who is so soon to be a martyr, fears the love of money. For greed more than anything else is calculated to destroy religion. "They that desire to be rich," he says, "fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish

and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition." At the root of all kinds of evil lies, he says, the love of money, "which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows," for though godliness is no "way of gain," yet "godliness with contentment is great gain." Few wants make without doubt for happiness.

The doctrine of the Pastoral Epistles is, to the thinking of the present writer, simpler than that of St. Paul's earlier writings, though the following verse from the First Epistle of Timothy may be said to sum up the Pauline theology as well as it could be summed up in so few words: "There is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all." The Apostle was face to face at Ephesus with great evils, which he evidently considered to be intimately connected with each other—superstition, scepticism, contentiousness, the spirit of revolt, and the love of luxury —and he combats them all by exhortations to simplicity. A simple creed and a simpler life he would have the Christians at Ephesus accept for their soul's health. Neither emotionalism, nor asceticism, nor Socialism finds

any encouragement in the Pastoral Epistles, " Godliness and gravity " is the sole burden of their discourse. It is in this direction only that his hearers must look for a cure. Bitter specifics they probably appeared to the first readers of the Apostle's letters; but the Apostle is assured of their tonic effect. Plain living and high thinking he prescribes to the Christian community, which has lost the purity of its earlier faith. Men must realise what in life is really worth having, and be prepared for some sacrifice if they would " lay hold on the life which is life indeed." What he hopes for his converts is not that they should be overwhelmed by emotion or confounded by logic, but that they should " recover themselves," being " taken captive by the Lord's servant unto the will of God."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SCRIPTURAL FOOL

In very few of His parables does our Lord make any direct allusion to God. The personifications of poetic justice who apportion praise and blame, rewards and punishments, and point with such marvellous force the moral of the stories, have been constantly deified by commentators; but if we consider what Christ said "plainly," without any "parable" about God, it is not easy to find warrant for their doctrine. In the parable of the Prodigal Son alone are we confronted with that perfect benevolence which Christ declared to be God-like.

But there is one parable in which our Lord speaks directly and without figure of God. He tells of a rich man who deliberately and in conscious self-communion determined to live for money and for pleasure. No special sin is related of him; he is threatened with no punishment; he lived prosperously, and died suddenly the common death of all men. Yet "God said unto him, Thou fool," and in

our better moments we all know that the verdict was true and inevitable. The sketch of the rich fool, as St. Luke records it, is very slight. He said to himself: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

Possibly the parable was spoken at greater length than we have it. At any rate, it was spoken to men familiar from their earliest years with the Hebrew "Wisdom" books, in which the fool plays a prominent part. To them it was not astonishing to hear a man who must presumably in some respects have been an able man called a fool. They had heard before of one who "getteth riches" and "at his end shall be a fool." For men and women brought up upon the Scriptures the word had a wide significance. The greater minds among the Jews had always regarded the lower forms of worldly wisdom as folly. The standard of the prophets was not that of the patriarchs. "The knowledge of wickedness is not wisdom," said the writer of Ecclesiasticus. Can a more high-minded sentence, or one more in accord with the teaching of Christ, be found? It was because the man who said there was no God

seemed to the Psalmist to be without spiritual apprehension that he called him a fool; and all through the Hebrew Scriptures the man who fails in his duty to his neighbours, who is a discordant element in every society, is constantly described as a fool. He stirs up strife. "It is sport to a fool to do mischief." He is always "meddling"; he "uttereth slander." "If thou hast heard a word, let it die with thee; be bold, it will not burst thee," the wise man admonishes the students of Wisdom. A fool, he goes on to instruct them, cannot do this. He cannot contain himself; he is not easy till he has brought forth dissension. His wrath is "heavy" and "presently known"; he will not hear argument; "he rageth and is confident." He takes no serious view of life: "Fools make a mock at sin." "The heart of fools is in the house of mirth," but "delight is not seemly for a fool." He is most odious when least sad. What a picture of a secular, sordid, vulgar man! The type was well formed before the Christian era. It is not broken yet.

It is not impossible that some or all of these sayings were in the mind of our Lord when He spoke to His hearers about a fool. But if it be considered presumptuous to suppose

so much, we may at least imagine that the story of the spiritual bankrupt who laid up "treasure for himself" and was "not rich toward God". brought such a picture before the Scripture-soaked minds of His hearers. Who, they must have asked themselves, is the wise man whom this new Teacher would commend, the man who is "rich toward God"? It is not probable that Galilean workmen—the common people who heard Christ gladly—answered that question as it is usually answered now. Ecclesiasticism has set its stamp on Christianity. We think of spiritual riches as something only possible to the spiritually gifted, or else as the reward of actual good deeds. But is it likely that Christ, who was preaching freedom to a people in religious bondage—a people tired out with religious observances—was counselling long prayers or spiritual "preparations," or extolling religious ecstasy? His hearers were working all day for their bread, and were already chafing against the religious preoccupation demanded of them. That Christ did regard good deeds as "a treasure" laid up for those who performed them is evident, but one cannot suppose that He was counselling, as Hindu teachers have counselled,

the industrious and never-ceasing acquisition of merit. Is it not probable that His hearers would have understood Him to mean all those riches which the fool of Scripture rejects,—the sympathy of God, which the fool was too secular to seek, the sympathy of man, which he was too selfish to obtain? Christ had declared, they may have remembered, that as a rule, so far as things worth having are concerned, people get back from their neighbours very much what they give. With what measure they mete it is measured to them. "Good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom." What has the Scriptural fool to give to anyone? According to the wise men, he has "no friends," for ordinary men, as our Lord assures us, salute their brethren only. There is no doubt a "way" of Christian perfection which makes men good "unto the unthankful and to the evil," but "few there be that find it." His bitter temper and his self-assertion, his rage and his confidence, create dislike and fear—even the natural affections which spring from the ties of blood are poisoned by them—his mischief makes men mad against him. There is a sense in which the "meek"

do "inherit the earth," all that is worth having in it. It is because we do not agree with Christ as to what is worth having that we find so much difficulty in understanding His words. John Lackland said: "Love is the leech of life"; without it "in vain are her many medicines." But apart from the closer affections, it is only the kind and tolerant—the men of determined good-will—who can really enjoy looking on at life, and surely our Lord, who made the parables, intended that we should have this enjoyment. If we refuse, there will be many years of life in which we shall have nothing to enjoy. In vain the rich fool says to himself, "Soul, take thine ease." "The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh." It is only through the medium of sympathy that we can really see our fellows. In the solitary confinement of selfishness there is no ease for the complex spirit of man. Again, it is the doom of those who make a mock at sin to take no pleasure in righteousness, never to feel their hearts warmed by the astonishment of an unexpected kindness, or inflamed by the sight of those deeds which for a moment glorify humanity and seem to stand between the world and its sins. The man who has

none of these immaterial sources of happiness is indeed poor " toward God," and to imagine that by eating, drinking, and being merry they can be replaced, is but one of those " dreams " which the prophets tell us " uplift fools."

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CHAPTER XXV

WHAT IS RELIGION ?

THE name of Professor Bousset is familiar to all readers of Biblical criticism. All the critics quote him—from Professor Jülicher to Professor Sanday—to confirm or to refute. Like Professor Harnack's, his books are well known in England, for he writes with a charm which the technicalities of his subject cannot impair, and he does not forget that if the science of literary and historical criticism is for the few, religion is still for the many. His new book, " What is Religion ? " (T. Fisher Unwin, 5s. net), cannot but remind the reader of Harnack's " What is Christianity ? " Indeed, the book might not improperly have appeared under Harnack's celebrated title, though it necessarily covers a considerably wider ground. It is not, of course, a history of religion. In the space of one small volume that would be impossible. Rather it is a brilliant historical essay about religion informed and inspired by a single idea : " Not only in Christianity is the highest point reached, but in it all former lines of religious

thought appear to converge." Until lately almost all the official advocates of Christianity argued its truth from its isolation. In Judaism alone was Christianity allowed to find affinity. Analogous traits in other religions were laboriously explained away. They were mere verbal coincidences or stray sparks from the Christian fire, according to the date of their origin. The workings of the Holy Spirit were to be sought for by Christians only in the Hebrew Scriptures until the year of our Lord, and after that only within the precincts of Christendom. In fact, the shadow of Jehovah obscured the face of the one God who, though a ruler over all from the beginning, had still His dwelling at Jerusalem. Such an evidence to Christianity was destined to destruction. Learning and sympathy have utterly destroyed it. Yet out of its ashes has arisen a far stronger proof. The learned men have wrested one sword at least from the hand of the sceptic, and have put it into the armoury of the Church. From every age and from every country, out of every civilisation and every stronghold of thought, Professor Bousset marshals his witnesses to Christ, the safety of Whose kingdom can never, he believes,

depend upon its circumscription, but is broad based within the heart of man upon a consensus of aspiration, a common hunger, and a common satisfaction.

He draws a picture which even those who find fault with his method must admit to be grandly conceived. He does not write for every imaginable reader. To those who hold that religion is "merely fantasy created by man's urgent impulse, and an illusion," he has, in his present work, nothing to say. The audience whom he desires must come from among such as "feel within themselves at least a questioning and a seeking after this side of life." It is of them he demands a judgment. Of them he would know whether he can make good his point, whether he may not arrive legitimately at this conclusion: "That the whole religious life of man and his history springs from the work and action of God by means of which He draws men individually from error to truth, from imperfection to perfection, from egoism to fraternity, from the sensual to the moral, from the natural to the spiritual, and attracts them to Himself."

At the furthest point from Christianity, yet always on the road thither, Professor

Bousset shows us the savage, whose religious notions are not easy for modern men to grasp, but which are docketed by the learned under the word "animism." He has little sense of his own individuality, little perception of the difference between men and animals, little of the distinction between animals and plants. He finds beasts among his ancestry. He is willing to believe that men are descended from trees, or that they sprang from the reeds in the river. He is part of a great life, but he is not a materialist. The one thing which seems to him incredible is death. "When death comes to man the body decays, but—and the belief is universal—the soul never dies." Out of this certainty springs for the savage the worship of ancestors. Indeed, "there are investigators who see in this worship of the dead the origin of all religion." In honouring a common ancestor the family soon develops into the tribe. Admission into the tribe is admission into the community of blood. In the blood is the life. A victim is killed, and the whole clan drinks his blood, and whoever desires to enter can do so only by drinking also. A sacrifice of blood is offered to the common ancestor or god of the tribe that the same blood may

run in the veins of the worshipper and the worshipped. At this stage the highest law known to the individual is blood-revenge, and the permanent condition of tribal life is one of blood-feud. Yet even here we see some dawning sense of altruism, some stirring of desire for a relationship with a Power outside the visible world.

The idea of nationality means the death of savagery, but "the basis of national life is the basis of polytheism." The separate tribes and districts which unite to form one nation and one country bring their tribal deities with them. "While in the one case there is unity of national life, in the other there is plurality of gods." As the distinctions of tribes fade away the gods remain. The god of the conquering race becomes, perhaps, the god of war, the god of the conquered the god of shepherd and peasant life. Soon men find in the gods their ideals, and images begin to play an important part. The stage reached by religions may be estimated according to the form chosen to represent the godhead. The human form in its noblest manifestation illustrates the last stage of polytheism. Professor Bousset claims the art of Greece as a witness to the

power of religion. "Freed from all earthly stain, raised above earthly sorrow, without flaw or blemish, magnificent types of strong, perfect manhood, noblest womanhood and maidenhood, these gods stood before the Greek man and woman, who bowed down before them." Led by the Old Testament writers, the world has undervalued the spirituality to be found in polytheistic religions,—so Professor Bousset teaches us. And truly, according to his quotations, there are portions of the psalms of Egypt found in the "Book of the Dead" not unworthy of a place beside the psalms of Israel:—

"Oh, Lord, Thy servant, cast him not away,
Plunged in the flood, stretch forth thy hand.
The sin which I have committed, transform by Thy grace!
The ill deeds I have done, let the winds carry away!"

Everywhere, writes Professor Bousset, "we are conscious of broken rays of a Divine nature which shine into the hearts of men; broken rays certainly, but rays of Divine majesty and glory, of Divine goodness and charity." But polytheism was destined to fall. Between the eighth and the sixth centuries B.C. it seems as if the tree of the religious life of mankind sent forth new shoots

at the same time in different places. The great prophets appeared in Israel. Perhaps at the same time, perhaps earlier, lived Zarathustra. "A religious movement began in Greece, the exponents of which were the great tragedians, later Socrates, and above all Plato." Buddha was doing his work in India, Confucius in China. All these men spoke to the world,—to man, and not to sections of men. After this great period of efflorescence Professor Bousset once more subdivides his subject, which falls, roughly speaking, into two parts,—the religions of the law as distinct from the religions of redemption. The one sought primarily to uphold the faltering steps of man by the galling support of the minutest discipline, the other to deliver his soul from the unending sorrows of the actual. In this connexion Professor Bousset, with a boldness only his brilliance can justify, couples the names of Buddha and Plato.

At last our author comes to Christianity. What is its essential nature, what its probable future? he asks. Professor Bousset casts aside with an almost barbarous roughness what he calls "the rubbish of tradition." Scholastic theology has not the remotest

interest for him. Christianity is to be found in the teaching and in the personality of Christ. In Him, according to Professor Bousset, the religions of the law and of redemption meet. He delivered men from ceremonial. He dethroned the Scribes. He redeemed men from the terror of the world by assuring them that when man aspires to God the old passes away and a new life is begun, and by bringing them into relation with "a personal Being" whom He calls "Father," for "the Gospel expresses in unsurpassed fashion the idea that the nature of God is not that of a universal, impersonal existence." He transformed the idea of judgment which strikes terror into the human conscience by changing the centre of moral gravity from action to motive, thus allowing a place for repentance. "He knew that as soon as the Divine 'Thou shalt' began to stream through the consciousness of man, earth-born man would oppose this voice, and then a mortal combat would arise. He knew that in this conflict we should never reach the goal appointed for us. And *because* He knew this Jesus revealed to His people a God of forgiveness, a God who does not look to the performances but is content with the

disposition that begets good-will, and daily He forgives sins. Here the Gospel of Jesus reaches its supreme height." All this, he says, is not laid down in the Gospel as a doctrine, but it is concentrated in a portrait. " His figure [the figure of our Lord]," he goes on, " is the noblest and the most perfect that has been granted to humanity on its long journey from the lower stage to the higher. He is the goal of our existence, the leader of our life, to whom no other leader is comparable." Such is the conclusion—the conclusion of one who has been accounted by timid spirits among the orthodox as a destructive critic—to which Professor Bousset's life-work has brought him, to, as he tells us, his " joyful astonishment." An extraordinary note of religious happiness and security sounds through the book. He speaks in the tones of the man who knows he has ventured all, and believes he has lost nothing.

CHAPTER XXVI

A DUAL PEOPLE

"THE genius, wit, and spirit of a nation are discovered in its proverbs," said Bacon; and surely of no nation is this so true as of the Jews.

"Hear, O Israel, Jehovah the Lord our God is one,
But we, Jehovah, His people are dual and so undone."

These words of Mr. Zangwill's contain in essence the tragedy of Israel. In the Book of Proverbs we find them marvellously illustrated. It shows forth more plainly than any other book in the Bible the two-fold nature of the only people among whom religious genius was not an occasional but a continuous phenomenon, rising for consecutive centuries into something like a constant inspiration; at the same time, a people whose greatest prophets failed finally to free them from the bondage of Mammon. In his proverbs we see the Jew as he is, as he was, and as we suppose he will be,—not at his greatest, the true Israelite in whom was no guile; not at his worst, a man of the earth earthy; but the average Jew, the type of a

dual people, with his love of learning and his appetite for wealth, his inspired admiration for mercy, his natural thirst for revenge, his noble fear of God, his ignoble regard for man.

The religious sentiment and the desire to know, the two spirits which the modern world distinguishes as the religious and the scientific, spring in the Jewish mind from a common root. Their conceptions of Wisdom and of Deity appear at times to be almost interchangeable. "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth," we read, and "If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." The quest of Wisdom is a religious quest. She "leads in the way of righteousness," and is to be preferred before all things: "wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding." A keen delight in something we now call culture—that sense of the æsthetic which comes to the widely exercised mind—existed, strangely enough, in a people whose religion forbade the development of painting and sculpture. "Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established: and by knowledge

shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches." The ancient Jews were more intolerant of fools than any people who have ever lived. Where wisdom and divinity are one, folly and iniquity cannot escape connection. "The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors," they declared. But the relation between foolishness and sin was not closer in the Jewish popular mind than the connection between righteousness and success. Right-doing pays. This is the dogma underlying almost the whole philosophy of Proverbs, though it is possible here and there to catch glimpses of an inspired doubt. There is a good deal in this view of life which is both fine and true, though the derivative notion of the connection between fault and failure is inevitably productive of cruelty, and accounts for the incapacity of the Jews to rid themselves of the belief that misfortune reflects upon character. The lowest moral depths to which this very seductive doctrine can lead its votaries is illustrated in the following words: "He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread." Even in these money-loving days the reader can but

wonder how the man who sought out and set in order the proverbs of his people had the candour to record such a one as this. As must inevitably be the case in any anthology of popular sayings, many of the proverbs preserved in the collection are contradictory. The cause of the poor man is amply defended, in spite of a few isolated sayings in deprecation of his condition. "He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker," is one among many sayings on the poor man's side. There is one proverb in which both aspects of the Jewish mind, its highest and its lowest, alike find expression: "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him." At first sight, the words convey nothing but a desire for revenge; but, on second thoughts, the reader is constrained to admit that a very fine idea is inextricably twisted in with a low passion. The philosopher knew that God was not necessarily against his enemy, that in rejoicing at his suffering he did wrong and sinned against light. A woeful lack of dignity which has always afflicted a part of the race is suggested in the following words: "In the light of the

king's countenance is life ; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain " ; and again : " A gift in secret pacifieth anger : and a reward in the bosom strong wrath." The same idea suggests itself in another saying we are about to quote, though the meaning is not so clear : " By long forbearing is a prince persuaded ; and a soft tongue breaketh the bone."

But the divine light is never long hidden in the religious history of the ancient Jews. Not only the prophets but the people had inklings which seem almost miraculous of a revelation that was to be made through them in the fulness of time. True, they regarded prosperity as, roughly speaking, the end and the proof of righteousness, but they realised at moments that this conviction would not always solve the riddle of life. Now and then they look farther off for an answer, and find in the future the irrevocable beneficence of the purpose of God. " The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just," they declare, and " He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor." Sometimes they even strain their eyes to see beyond the grave. " The righteous hath hope in his

death" is a proverb. "Love covereth all sins" has, again, a popular origin, and shines as a spark among the treasures of common Jewish wisdom. Possibly it was that very spark which fired the mind of St. Paul when his inspiration rose to its highest in praise of charity. "Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work," suggests the teaching of our Lord Himself.

The common folk who said: "Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: for their redeemer is mighty," raised in a single saying an eternal shelter for the helpless under the splendid patronage of God. What, taking the book as a whole, is the chaff to the wheat? Surely the proportion of chaff is small. What of those proverbs which cannot properly be described as either the one or the other, which do not come within the order of morals at all? In accordance with the Jewish spirit, they are few. Some of them, of course, have passed into all languages. The one concerning hope deferred and the intimacy of all poignant bitterness and joy are examples of these. A few of the less known, though they sink less deep into the mind, are hardly less

poignant. Take two instances: "The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools"; "As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am I not in sport?"

In the midst of all the heavenly wisdom and worldly shrewdness preserved for us from the common talk of so many centuries ago we find embedded one or two enchanting lyrics. Were they fragments of folk-songs? Who can say? Those who made them sang of the ideal woman of their country, who was lovely and prudent in all her ways, who stretched out her hands to the poor, clothed her household in scarlet, and rejoiced the hearts of her husband and children; of the ideal life, untrammelled by poverty, unburdened by wealth, with food sufficient and a thankful heart; of the eternal mystery of the world and the eternal romance of youth.

Seer, saint, poet, worldling, child of grace and of Nature, servant of God and of Mammon, the Jew of the Proverbs appears to-day in the judgment-hall of Europe, and pleads his right to standing-room upon an alien floor. To what extent is the Gentile in his debt, to what extent is he in debt to the

Gentile? The secular world listens to the recital of his wrongs without much emotion. The two accounts, in its judgment, are pretty well balanced. If Europe has persecuted the Jew, Europe has paid for her pleasure in the coin of every realm. But as he reasons of righteousness and judgment, surely the religious—such of them, at least, whose ears are not closed by fanaticism—must tremble. The Protestant Church, who has drawn her life from his literature, at all events cannot listen unmoved. The words of a Jew as he pleaded with Philemon for a favour sound with menacing distinctness in her ear: "I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DREAMS OF THE BIBLE

SCIENCE has not yet succeeded in analysing the stuff that dreams are made of, and the modern world, which chafes under the thought of the inexplicable, tries deliberately to disregard them. To the prophets and chroniclers of the Bible, on the other hand, dreams formed part of the evidence of things not seen. The Jewish thinker taxed his mental and spiritual powers to find out their significance, and though it occurred to him occasionally that their bearing upon practical life might be exaggerated, and the uncertainty of their interpretation prove a danger to the community, he could never free himself from their spell. The supreme desire of the Jew was to find out God. He looked everywhere for some proof of His rule. In the course of history, in the small events of daily life, in his own conscience, and in the visions of the night he found traces of the Divine Presence. For him the heavens were not empty, neither were the waste spaces of the mind. "A watcher and an holy one"

concerned himself ceaselessly with the affairs of men, and who could tell at what moment or by what means He might reveal His will? Jehovah was about his path and about his bed. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit?" he exclaimed. Neither in heaven, nor in hell, nor in the uttermost parts of the earth could the devout Jew hide himself; even upon the wings of the morning he could not flee from the presence of God. How, then, could Jehovah be excluded from the immaterial world of dreams?

Some of the visions recorded in the Old Testament are full of terror, of beauty, and of awe. We are not surprised that they seemed to the dreamers to have some spiritual significance. Others are mere word-pictures bearing no obvious meaning, and would be unworthy of record but for the interpretations put upon them by the prophets and moralists to whom they were told. Jacob's dream has inspired untold painters, but his waking comment, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not," says more to the modern mind than the angelic picture which called it forth. Among the Jews religious genius was so widespread that it was not confined, as it has commonly been among the Gentiles,

to the highest types of mind and character. Sudden realisations of beauty and divinity came to men, like Jacob, who were capable of idealism, but whose actions were frequently prompted by self-interest and cunning. The earth was full of the knowledge of God; even bad men were not in ignorance. Jacob's dreaming thoughts turned to heaven, but on the practical side he had a low mind. All the great men of the Old Testament, even the great mystics, had a practical side to their minds. The great poets were also the great moralists and statesmen, sometimes even, as in the case of David, the great soldiers. Even when the prophets concern themselves with dreams they seldom lose sight altogether of this present world. When Daniel tells us that in his dream "the four winds of heaven strove upon the great sea," he seems to carry his reader upon the wings of sleep outside the body and outside the limitations of the waking world altogether. We do not ask what he meant; we are content to breathe for a moment the free atmosphere of the true poet. Yet Daniel could turn dreaming to very plain moral and political account when occasion offered. Nebuchadnezzar was threatened with insanity, with

that insanity, it would seem, which so often attacks those overburdened with wealth and power. His greatness preyed upon his mind and overbalanced his judgment. "His spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him." He had a dream which left him in agitation, and the interpretation of which he could not divine. Only the Jew Daniel among his wise men would undertake to tell him its significance. The King had dreamed, he said, of a great tree whose top reached to heaven, and whose branches shadowed the earth. There went forth a divine command that this tree should be cut down; yet it should not be utterly destroyed; the root should remain. This meant, Daniel declared, that the King would be mad for a season,—"till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will." In view of this fearful destiny, Nebuchadnezzar asks advice, and Daniel speaks like a latter-day physician. He must lead a good life; he must occupy himself with useful work; he must forswear excitement; he must not despair; in the end he will be cured. "Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening

of thy tranquillity." Some day he will be once more fit to govern his people, "after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule."

It is not the fashion among modern commentators to make much of the Messianic prophecies to be found in Scripture, and no doubt they have been too often read in the light of future events. It is easy, however, to condemn the credulity of our grandparents too severely. Most of them were more familiar with the words of the Old Testament than we are. Perhaps that is why they were more struck by its marvels. How can one doubt that some among the Jews hoped for a Christ-like Messiah,—not for a man of war, but for a Prince of Peace,. a wonderful Counsellor, whose words would transcend the bonds of tribal limitation, who would do away with burnt-offerings and teach self-sacrifice, who would proclaim Jehovah King over the whole earth, yet bring Him near to the heart of the humblest man ? There is, at least, one dream recorded in a now much neglected book of the Old Testament which it is difficult altogether to dissociate from the thought of Christ. The vision would seem to be illumined by the

light of the Gospel. The prophet lay, he tells us, "in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees." Then he heard a voice saying, "Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard." Awestruck by the sound of the voice, the prophet declares that there "remained no strength" in him. "Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened." After this a change comes over the spirit of the dream. Is it not in the very nature of dreams that it should be so? We are plunged among wars and rumours of wars in an utter confusion of memory and prophecy. In these days we finish the book with impatience, yet cannot forget the vision of "one like the appearance of a man."

In the New Testament a far less place is given to dreams than in the Old, and they are never mentioned by our Lord, except

in a possible allusion to Jacob's dream. Joseph was warned in a dream to save the life of the infant Saviour; by a dream Peter was convinced that God was no respecter of persons; Paul took courage from dreams; but these incidents are mentioned simply, and without any comment which could lead us to understand how much importance was ordinarily given in the early Church to the thoughts which come unbidden in sleep.

It is a curious fact that in Deuteronomy—the book from which our Lord quotes so continually—the practice of putting absolute faith in dreams is deprecated, and diviners and necromancers are severely condemned. Jeremiah also warns his hearers against those who tell dreams. They cause the people to err, he says, "by their lies, and by their lightness." Christ was, no doubt, familiar with these words, and He may have thought the subject one which endangered the predominance of that sound common-sense which He so evidently regarded as a tower of defence to the religious spirit. Anyhow, His silence on the subject cannot be disregarded.

Poetry is, of course, susceptible of no

literal interpretation. Sometimes in Scripture the assurance of faith is spoken of as a "vision,"—a vision which comes and goes, which cannot be commanded but must ever be desired, in the absence of which "the people perish," and for which it behoves every man to wait in devout expectation. The prophet Habakkuk speaks of such a vision as this, and to the men of this generation his words still sound fresh. He is full of faith, yet he admits his knowledge to be small. He waits for a revelation which has not yet been vouchsafed. "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me." Then in a triumphant burst of hope he prophesies the revived faith of the world. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MESSAGE OF JEREMIAH

A NEW commentator (the Rev. J. R. Gillies) compares the Book of Jeremiah to the "Confessions of St. Augustine" and to "The Imitation of Christ." Two more renowned critics—Professor Davidson and Professor Driver—without making this somewhat startling comparison, both call their readers' attention to the note of intimacy which sounds throughout his prophecy. The relation of the Jewish nation to Jehovah was the theme of the earlier prophets. Jeremiah foresaw the destruction of the nation, and in the midst of his despair—standing, as he tells us, in a dark wilderness where "there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled"—he became conscious of a relation which could not be destroyed—the relation of every individual soul to its Maker. Jeremiah's mental position at the beginning of his life was perhaps the most tragic in which a patriotic Jew could find himself. He feared that his people had become too corrupt, had lost *moral*, too completely, to be any longer capable of preserving

a national existence. Spiritual religion—the strength of Israel—had been crushed out by formalism and superstition. The nation "had forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns." The love of money had seduced men from all wholesome thoughts and occupations. Everyone, "from the least of them even unto the greatest," was given to covetousness; everyone dealt falsely, "from the prophet even unto the priest." Sexual morality was at a low ebb. Scandalous extremes of wealth and poverty destroyed the integrity of the nation. The rich men built splendid houses and withheld the workmen's wages. In accordance with the law, they released their slaves on the appointed day only to bind them again upon the morrow. All sorts of imposters, dreamers, and false prophets suggested every remedy but reform. "In vain," however, were their "many medicines." A "bitter thing" had come to pass. Israel had lost the fear of the Lord, and was only "wise to do evil."

Like every patriot, the prophet hoped against hope, and continually preached repentance, beginning with the poor. The ignorant people repulsed him for lack of understanding.

"Surely these are poor; they are foolish," he said. "I will get me unto the great men." "If ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings," he pleaded; "if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt,"—then even at the eleventh hour the danger might be averted. But the rich would not listen, the powerful men had become outrageous in their wickedness. They had "altogether broken the yoke and burst the bonds." In their eyes whoever denounced the wickedness of the State was a traitor to the State. "Let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war," they cried. He "seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt." So they all went their own way, and "no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course as the horse rusheth into the battle."

In the midst of his indignation with a people who would not hear, a doubt born of sympathy seems to have crossed the mind of the reformer. They would not repent; but

was it certain that they could? There were still many who believed in themselves, both as a nation and as individuals. They prided themselves upon a religious superiority which belonged to the past, and upon a righteousness which had become a mere tradition. "We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us," they said, "wherein have we sinned?" Were they wholly responsible? Might not Jehovah make some allowance for a people who did not realise their own condition? He thought that in justice He would, and heard the voice of the Spirit saying: "I will plead with thee again because thou sayest, We have not sinned." "The heart is deceitful, and it is desperately sick" (thus the commentators translate), the prophet reflected; "who shall know it?" The Jewish public still retained a ceremonial respect for the law; but they had lost their living faith, and Jeremiah bitterly confesses that his own sometimes wavers. To use an old-fashioned expression, he wrestles continually with God, and even upbraids his Maker. Where are the promises made to David? "Ah, Lord God! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the

sword reacheth unto the soul." Even in his own mind there is no peace. "Why is my pain perpetual?" he asks. "Wilt thou be altogether unto me . . . . . as waters that fail?" Neither without nor within does he see any hope. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved," he sighs.

Any close political analogy between the Israel of two thousand five hundred years ago and a European State to-day is impossible. The destiny of the Jews was to direct for ever the innermost thoughts of the Western world, and to remain constantly under their heavy hand. Our destiny seems to be far other. Only when the ephemeral drama in which the nations act merges in the eternal drama whose scene is in the human soul do conditions remain comparable. Before the advent of Biblical criticism it was the custom to take all that Jeremiah said of the Jews at a given moment as though it applied for ever to the whole human race. Such an interpretation is unreasonable. Nevertheless, it is clear that Jeremiah drew some of his finest passages from his own spiritual experience, and that he identified himself often with the people whom he upbraided.

Some of his expressions of penitence and despair come from a deeper gulf than that in which political misgiving could plunge a man, and his outbursts of religious joy are surely individual rather than national. When he cries: "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved," we feel that the world has rightly believed him to be revealing his own soul; and when the word of the Lord comes to him, saying, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," we feel his thoughts are inspired by something more personal than history. Jeremiah, without a doubt, connected repentance with a true faith; and he meant by repentance something more than reformation, he meant a sense of sin. By the absence of the one he accounted for the loss of the other. From his time onward almost all the great religious teachers have done the same, and the measure of their guilt has been no measure of their sorrow. The moral estimates which St. Augustine, Luther, Bunyan, and Wesley made of themselves before they found peace in an unshakable faith,—they were not sinners above all sinners, whatever they may have considered themselves—modern men cannot entirely accept, any more than they

can entirely accept their dogmatic conclusions. On the other hand, they cannot but envy their faith, and at times for its sake they are tempted to envy even the agony of their remorse.

Nowadays we are inclined in our heart of hearts to doubt whether we are miserable sinners. Altogether justified we do not feel, and at moments we have for ourselves a contempt more poignant than anything we feel for our neighbours. But such a passion of repentance as was once accounted a common religious experience is rare indeed, as rare as its concomitant,—a feeling of sudden religious ecstasy to gain which men counted the world but dross. We do not suppose for a moment that there can be joy in the presence of the angels of God about us. At the same time, we are not like the Pharisee; and if we see all the excuses there are for ourselves, we see all that there are for the publican also. Is it not inevitable that those who exercise their powers of imagination and self-control in their efforts to forgive their neighbours should also learn to some extent to forgive themselves? Ought we to try to induce in ourselves the remorse which prostrated our fathers in order to attain to their

faith? Is our spiritual sickness desperate because we cannot do so? Surely such an idea is morbid in the extreme. The true aim of religion is not that a man should know himself, but that he should know God. In struggling to plumb the depths of his own depravity he may lose his reason, but he will not find faith. In struggling to improve and strengthen his conception of God, on the other hand, he will most likely learn to condemn himself. The motive-force of the world is ideals, not remorse, which cannot be sought after by the healthy-minded. It is true that with the sense of sin something of the assurance of faith has gone from Christendom. But we are not bound in these days to consider the two phenomena as cause and effect. Rather may we not accept both changes as part of the education of man? It is very doubtful whether spiritual suffering has decreased. We suffer from doubt as we never suffered before, and as we look back we cannot but hope and believe that in that suffering lies the cure of religious indifference. We suffer from a consciousness of the corporate pain of the world as we never suffered before, and we trust that in this purgative suffering lies the cure for human cruelty.

If we had Luther's agony of penitence as well, we should be tried above what we are able. Much of Jeremiah's prophecy has become to us as "a very lovely song,"—as music which enhances, or even creates, a shadowy or non-existent emotion, but which leaves no permanent effect. Yet he has still something to say to us who live two thousand five hundred years after his death. He prophesied, and Christ confirmed, the final success of the seeker after God. He declared, and Christ confirmed, the infinite mercy of the Deity, a mercy sometimes so hard to trace. "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord," he wrote at the height of his inspiration. "Thoughts of peace, and not of evil. . . . . Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Belief in a God of vengeance, though at times such a belief recurred to him, Jeremiah when his genius burned brightest altogether discarded. "He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth," he assures us, "the Lord approveth not." Here he expressed the faith that men of to-day long for, the goal of peace to which all the prophets point.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

THE Apocryphal Scriptures deserve to be better read. They teem with wisdom and eloquence. The Church of England, while denying their authority, recommends their study "for example of life and instruction of manners," and it is unfortunate from the point of view of letters, if from no other, that her advice in this matter has been so little followed. The Apocrypha begins with the Book of Esdras, and the first four chapters contain a wonderful story. The incidents are briefly these. Darius, King of the Persians, had promised the Jews that they should be permitted to rebuild Jerusalem. "Rathumus the story-writer, and Semellius the scribe, and the rest of their council, and the judges that are in Celosyria and Phenice," represented to him "that if this city be built again, and the walls thereof set up anew, thou shalt from henceforth have no passage in Celosyria and Phenice." In accordance with this advice, he broke his oath, and forbade the building to continue. A young

Jew employed about the Court determined to wring from Darius a renewal of his concession. He and two other young men of the body-guard arranged a contest of wits which was to take place in a season of mirth before Darius. Whatever may have been the race of the others, he who won was a Jew, and exacted permission to rebuild Jerusalem as his reward.

In the second year of his reign Darius "made a great feast unto all his subjects, and unto all his household, and unto all the princes of Media and Persia, and to all the governors and captains and lieutenants that were under him, from India unto Ethiopia, of an hundred twenty and seven provinces." At the end of the first day, when the guests "had eaten and drunken, and being satisfied were gone home," in the middle of the night the three young men met together to devise an entertainment for next day. They "spake one to another" and said: "Let every one of us speak a sentence: he that shall overcome, and whose sentence shall seem wiser than the others, unto him shall the king Darius give great gifts, and great things in token of victory." Accordingly "every one wrote his sentence, sealed

it, and laid it under king Darius his pillow." These sentences were to be the subjects of rival speeches, and were as follows: "The first wrote, Wine is the strongest. The second wrote, The king is strongest. The third wrote, Women are strongest: but above all things Truth beareth away the victory." Presently, "when the king was risen up, they took their writings, and delivered them unto him." Then Darius sent forth, and called "all the princes of Persia and Media, and the governors, and the captains, and the lieutenants, and the chief officers; and sat him down in the royal seat of judgment; and the writings were read before them."

The young men began their contest, and the first speaker was he who had written of the strength of wine, "and he said thus, O ye men, how exceeding strong is wine! it causeth all men to err that drink it: it maketh the mind of the king and of the fatherless child to be all one; of the bondman and of the freeman, of the poor man and of the rich: it turneth also every thought into jollity and mirth, so that a man remembereth neither sorrow nor debt, and it maketh every heart rich, so that a man remembereth neither king nor governor; and it maketh

to speak all things by talents: and when they are in their cups, they forget their love both to friends and brethren, and a little after draw out swords: but when they are from the wine, they remember not what they have done. O ye men, is not wine the strongest, that enforceth to do thus? And when he had so spoken, he held his peace." It is difficult to imagine how the delight and consolation, the degradation and oblivion, to be found in strong drink could be better described. The audience make no comment upon the discourse.

"The second that had spoken of the strength of the king" began immediately. Plainly he was a courtier. His flattery is finely worded. He knows his work, reckons with his host, and does not fear to disgust with praise a man born in the purple. "O ye men," he exclaims, "do not men excel in strength, that bear rule over sea and land, and all things in them? But yet the king is more mighty: for he is lord of all these things, and hath dominion over them." The king, he reminds the assembled vassals, is but one man, yet the lives and deaths of all his subjects are in his hands. "If he bid them make war the

one against another, they do it." At his word "they slay and are slain." Not his armies alone acknowledge his supremacy. "Those that are no soldiers, and have not to do with wars, but use husbandry, when they have reaped again that which they have sown, they bring it to the king, and compel one another to pay tribute unto the king." The king is disobeyed in nothing. "If he command to kill, they kill; if he command to spare, they spare; if he command to smite, they smite; if he command to make desolate, they make desolate; if he command to build, they build; if he command to cut down, they cut down; if he command to plant, they plant." There is not a word in all his speech about what is or should be the attitude of the ruler. It is a piece of servile homage paid to power alone.

"Then the third, who had spoken of women, and of the truth," and who is, of course, a Jew and the victor, "began to speak." It is not, he declares, "the great king, nor the multitude of men, neither is it wine, that excelleth; who is it then that ruleth them, or hath the lordship over them? Are they not women? Women have borne the king and all the people that bear rule by sea and land. Even of them

came they: and they nourished them up that planted the vineyards, from whence the wine cometh." Men love to amass silver and gold and treasures of every kind, yet, "letting all those things go," they "fix their eyes fast on her." Do they not "labour and toil, and give and bring all to the woman"? And those that love a life of adventure, to whom romance is more than merchandise, is it not the same with them? "Yea, a man taketh his sword, and goeth his way to rob and to steal, to sail upon the sea and upon rivers; and looketh upon a lion, and goeth in the darkness; and when he hath stolen, spoiled, and robbed, he bringeth it to his love." What power has reason against her charm? "Yea, many there be that have run out of their wits for women, and become servants for their sakes. Many also have perished, have erred, and sinned, for women." And now, with the strange histrionic power of the Jew, the speaker forces his audience to illustrate his theme. Is not the king who sits before them "great in his power," yet who sits beside him? "Apame," who is "the daughter of the admirable Bartacus." At this very moment is she not proving the truth of his argument? "taking the crown

from the king's head, and setting it upon her own head; she also struck the king with her left hand." The king is under her spell, "he gazed upon her" without resentment. "If she laughed upon him, he laughed also: but if she took any displeasure at him, the king was fain to flatter, that she might be reconciled to him again. O ye men, how can it be but women should be strong, seeing they do this?" Like a true artist, the speaker knows up to what point he can strain the sympathy of his audience. Now "the king and the princes looked upon one another: so he began to speak of the truth." With even greater hardihood than he has shown already, he begins his peroration: "Great is the truth, and stronger than all things," he cries. "It endureth, and is always strong; it liveth and conquereth for evermore." Truth is the eternal quest of man. The stars are kept in their courses thereby. "All the earth calleth upon the truth, and the heaven blesseth it: all works shake and tremble at it, and with it is no unrighteous thing. Wine is wicked, the king is wicked, women are wicked, all the children of men are wicked, and such are all their wicked works; and there is no truth in them;

in their unrighteousness also they shall perish." But truth must remain "the strength, kingdom, power, and majesty, of all ages. Blessed be the God of truth."

The third is "found wisest," and is told to ask for what he will. "Then said he unto the king, Remember thy vow, which thou hast vowed to build Jerusalem, in the day when thou comest to thy kingdom." When the day was over and the guests departed and "when this young man was gone forth, he lifted up his face to heaven toward Jerusalem, and praised the King of heaven, and said, From thee cometh victory, from thee cometh wisdom, and thine is the glory, and I am thy servant. Blessed art thou, who hast given me wisdom: for to thee I give thanks, O Lord of our fathers."

So does this ancient writer of history or of fiction depict for us the manners of the Persian Court. He is a realist, but also an idealist, as every realist must be who does not leave out of account one half of the facts of the world. The scene suggested in so few strokes is brilliant,—a crowned and liveried crowd, pleased with flattery, tolerant of vulgarity, alive to every intellectual sensation. The modern realist would probably

show us this and nothing more. The ancient Hebrew pursues reality further. He goes below the surface, and seeks underneath for the sources of our social and spiritual being. He opens for us the heart of one man, and shows in juxtaposition to the vanity, pride, servility, and worldly wisdom, which any casual observer may see and censure, the two stronger and more lasting emotions of patriotism and religion. It is this which makes the first four chapters of Esdras not merely a picture of manners as they were more than two thousand years ago, but an instruction in life as it always remains.

CHAPTER XXX

"THE EARTH WITH HER BARS"

THE literature of the ancient Jews remains the greatest witness to man's capacity for religious perception, but nowhere are the limits of that perception more passionately expressed. "Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?" asked the lawgiver, who understood the genius and the destiny of his race. Yet another prophet proclaimed with no less authority: "The earth with her bars was about me for ever." These two ideas, the idea of divine inspiration and of human limitation, colour almost every page of the Old and New Testaments. The nation was preoccupied with the thought of God. For the Jew wisdom began with the fear of the Lord. The knowledge of God was the foundation of all knowledge, the only thing worth seeking with a man's heart and soul and strength. They were fools who said there was no God, men aberrated mentally and morally. The heroes of Jewish

history are the "prophets of God," who best interpreted the religious experience of the people, who gave voice to the public conscience, condemned the backslidings of the multitude, and kept the nation in mind of its spiritual separation.

That he might fit himself for the knowledge of God, the Jew conformed to a law which permeated every moment of his life and prescribed his every movement. In each political calamity, in each personal sorrow, in all success and in all failure, he looked for the hand of God. The history of his world and the story of his daily life became a record of divine discipline. But, like all preoccupation, his religious obsession blinded him at times to things as they are. He was so certain that righteousness ought to prosper that he could not see that very often it produced worldly disaster. He began to think that prosperity proved virtue and misfortune misconduct. In his meticulous observance of rules he forgot the principles of which they were but the minute applications. "It is not the moral law because it is written. It is written because it is the moral law," is a truth outside the grasp of the average devout man, even when he comes of a race

distinguished for religious genius. Thus the Jew materialised his religion, and "the earth with her bars" set a limit to his spiritual attainment. Nevertheless, among the greater minds there never wanted spokesmen of the Lord, who reminded men that conformity to a system was not true and laudable service, that sacrifice was neither more nor less than a symbol, and that the eternal truth that "though a sinner do evil an hundred times . . . . . it shall be well with them that fear God," was not overthrown by the success of the tyrant or by the "pitiful sighing" of the poor. It is only the seer who dares to be inconsistent. The multitude must have logic, or they will have nothing. God ruled, they said, and God is righteous. The triumph of virtue was but the logical sequence of an inward certainty. In vain Job declared, as Paul declared after him, that the thoughts of the Creator are not explicable by men, that "the earth with her bars" forbade them to judge of the purpose of God. The people built monuments to the prophets who pointed to the truth, and once more blindfolded their own eyes with a worn-out theory.

By the Crucifixion overt success was proved

for ever useless as a measure of goodness. Christianity, however, did not supply the world with any answer to the problem of pain; rather, in proving that no solution lies in the word "punishment," it further involved the question. Christ nowhere broke the bars of ignorance by which we are hemmed in. He has been the consolation of the Western world, and in their Christ-inspired confidence in God religious people often forget how little He has satisfied their curiosity. Why do the good suffer? He suffered also, He "tasted death for every man," but He did not say. Where are the dead? The Gospel affords no answer, except that they are alive, and that when our time also is finished we must commend our spirits into the hands of God the Father, Who is the God of the living. We cannot conceive of a disembodied spirit. "With what body do they come?" men asked of St Paul; and the Roman Jew, to whom Christ had revealed His relation to God, and who, whatever his occasional agonies of mind, his occasional fears lest he himself might be a castaway, yet felt

"Through all this early dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness,"

replied "Thou fool," and, conscious of the omnipresence of the life-giving God, proceeded to elaborate an analogy. His conviction remains convincing; his argument belongs to the past. We feel that we were indeed fools to ask. "The earth with her bars" precludes an answer; but the voice of God, speaking out of the midst of the fires of religious passion, once more proclaims the sure and certain hope.

It has been said by a learned exponent of modern Judaism (Mr. Israel Abrahams) that "Judaism never attempted to define God at all." "He is the Great, the Mighty, the Awful, the Most High, the King. But He is also the Father, Helper, Deliverer, the Peacemaker, Supporter of the Weak, Healer of the Sick." But, above all, He "is nigh them that fear him." Almost the same words might be used of the conception of God presented to us in the Gospel. Our Lord accentuated one aspect of the prophet's conception, He did not deny the others. In His parables He implied them all, but He never attempted any philosophical definition of Deity whatever. The religion of the Gospels and the theology of the schoolmen represent opposite types of

thought. Our Lord accepted the fact that finite minds cannot grasp the infinite. The Creator of the universe, who is "above all, and through all, and in you all," does, indeed, make Himself manifest to the human soul; but the human mind can express its experience of the divine in metaphor only. "The earth with her bars" forbids that we should do more than this.

Again, it is impossible for the average man to give more than a part of his attention and consideration to the subject of the supernatural. His duty lies within the bars of earth. He must by very mundane work support himself and those dear to him. In the course of that work he must of necessity encounter innumerable temptations, to some of which it seems inevitable that he should succumb. "It must needs be that offences come." said Christ, and He would not pray for any of those whom He desired to deliver from evil that they should be taken out of the world. A great part of His teaching is concerned with the means of reconciliation between the divine and human spirits after that conscious rebellion against the divine command which constitutes sin. He came, "not to call the righteous, but sinners to

repentance." It is useless to blink the difficulties of Christian teaching on this subject. "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little," said Christ, and it is a hard saying for all its infinite graciousness. We cannot wish it blotted out from the Book. It rings true to the ear of the soul. But when we turn it into logic, and ask, Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound, we are constrained to exclaim with St. Paul, "God forbid!" or else we should deny the whole spirit of the Gospel. Free-will and predestination are not the only indubitable truths which the limits of the human mind—"the earth with her bars"—forbids us to reconcile here.

But it may be said,—If the very conditions of our nature prevent all logical and all scientific proof of the great doctrines of religion, surely the attitude of the agnostic is the only rational attitude. There is, we would reply, a form of agnosticism which is not incompatible with faith. St. Paul expressed in one sentence the mental position of thousands of devout thinkers to-day: "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same

is known of him." If religion consisted in nothing but man's effort by searching to find out God, "the earth with her bars" would make of the search nothing but a recurrent tragedy, the perpetual attempt of man to support himself upon the staff of a creed which his own advance in civilisation is for ever breaking in his hand. But religion, and above all the Christian religion, is not primarily a creed, otherwise our Lord would have left us a formula of belief. It is primarily a Communion. Man's desire for the knowledge of God is not in the first instance a call, it is an answer. For God Almighty the bars of earth have no restrictive force. Neither ignorance nor sin has power to prevent the divine influence. To realise this is to perform the great act of faith, to make the great surrender not of the mind but of the spirit, and upon this faith the creeds are but commentaries.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE EPIC OF PATIENCE

"YE have heard of the patience of Job," said St. James; and no doubt for centuries before he wrote that patience had been proverbial. Certainly, patience is the idea which has been universally connected with the book; it is an idea which is latent throughout its pages; but we doubt if patience was the quality which its author definitely intended to inculcate, if, indeed, he had a definite intention of inculcating any quality at all. To our mind, the Book of Job can hardly be called a didactic poem. It is rather the self-revelation of a man inspired to reveal his soul, and endowed with such powers of expression that his work has remained fresh after a lapse of more than two thousand years. The moral of the book, or, as we would rather say, the upshot of the thoughts which its author sets before the world, seems to us to be this, that the obscurantist, however sincere his purpose, however passionately he is devoted to a right end, is on the wrong road; while he who will

face the facts with sufficient determination and perseverance will at last arrive at his goal. Job faces the facts of life without flinching, and refuses every explanation which ignores them, while his friends take refuge in a beautiful and consolatory theory. Many scholars say that the Hebrew poet used an old story as a vehicle for his new ideas, just as Goethe and Shakespeare did much later on. It is easy for the ordinary reader to believe this, for the story plays a very insignificant part as compared to the controversy which makes up the bulk of the book, and the God of the controversy is an infinitely greater and more spiritual conception than the God of the story. A deity who plagued a saint in order to illustrate an argument into which He fell with Satan is not the God for whom Job searched in his anguish of mind, and to whose infinite wisdom he was able at last to commend his soul in ignorance and in peace.

Job sees in the light of his sufferings and his good conscience that sin and calamity, righteousness and prosperity, are not indissolubly joined together, and are not mutually explanatory, as in the days of his

good fortune he was content to believe. In fearful distress of mind he arraigns the justice of the Creator. His friends come to him and endeavour by means of argument to bring him back to the religious system within which he was born, and out of which he finds himself compelled to break. This is, so to speak, the plot of the controversy ; and as we read, the consummate skill of the artist enables him to throw, not only as much poetry, but as much wisdom and conviction into one side of the scale as into the other. He enters so completely into both points of view that the casual hearer in church often vaguely imagines that the hero of the poem is instructing him in patience, while all the time it is the friends of Job who are rebuking him for rebellion. So true is this that while certain commentators regard the work as definitely dramatic, others have justified the popular view by declaring that the whole discussion was intended by its author to take place in the mind of one man.

We think that for the ordinary reader of the English version, who has heard none of these divergent theories, but who takes the trouble to go straight through all the chapters, the Book of Job resolves itself into a sort of

duologue between two voices alternately arraigning and defending the divine government of the world; a duologue which again resolves itself into a vision (wherein God is justified) granted by the Holy Spirit to the man who prayed for courage to look upon truth. At the very beginning of his troubles, though Job will not "curse God, and die," as his wife advises him to do in one of those accesses of reckless desperation which occasionally take hold of the helpless witness of suffering, he yet does curse the day on which he was born. Why, he demands of God, did He not let him die before he saw the light? "For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest, with kings and counsellors of the earth." There is no justice on earth, he complains. "The just upright man is laughed to scorn," and "they that provoke God are secure." The heavens are as brass, and there seems no outlet for his sorrow. "Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment. He hath fenced up my way." It is not a question of waiting; he sees by observation and experience that even in the end the righteous sufferer is not righted. "One

dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet . . . . . another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure." Death itself, earnestly as he desires it, appears to his tormented mind as the last injustice. If the days of man were indefinitely prolonged, there might be some chance of a turn of fortune ; but now they are " swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope." Man, he feels, is worse off than the insensate creations of Nature. " There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground ; Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth, and wasteth away : yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he ? " He longs to find some solution " before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death ; A land of darkness, as darkness itself ; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness." The bitterness of his soul is increased by the thought of his littleness and the impotence of his rebellion. " If

I speak of strength," he cries, "lo, he is strong: and if of judgment, who shall set me a time to plead?" The thought of the infinite inequality between God and man, and the fact that there is no mediator between the soul and its Creator, drive him to despair. "For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both."

Job's friends are not only certain of God's absolute justice, but are sure that it can be traced. Job must, they say, have committed signal sins to be thus signally punished. "If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee," says one. "Who ever perished, being innocent?" demands another. They implore Job to repent, but he maintains his innocence, and refuses to make a false avowal of guilt. "Thou knowest that I am not wicked," he declares to God Himself. "I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out." But Job's friends cling to their theory. Eliphaz describes how his

faith has been delivered to him in one of the finest passages in the book: "Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men . . . . . there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?" Even in their most merciful moods Job's counsellors see nothing but a discipline in his suffering, and bid him not to despise the chastening of the Almighty, "for he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole." But by all their wisdom Job is not one whit impressed. "No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you," he scornfully replies to them; and again: "I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead." Yet all through the struggle, and long before intercourse with God is vouchsafed to him, Job has his calmer moments, when he remembers the days of his youth and of his unshaken faith, "when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle." Sometimes he dreams of a future life, when all shall be made clear; he clings to an intuition, and forsakes his

reasoning. "I know that my redeemer liveth," he exclaims; and "though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

In the end the poet takes on the rôle of prophet. He puts his words into the mouth of God, and sums up in a burst of passionate irony. Jehovah, indeed, speaks from a whirlwind. Can Job, He asks, control the universe, can he understand the divine plans? Will he not accept the intuitions which are from God without being able to prove them by argument? "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?" The reader can but wonder if the pomp of words goes as far in the original Hebrew. "Have the gates of death been opened unto thee?" He continues; "or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?" Need Job, for all his intellectual power, distrust the inspiration of so great a teacher, "who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart?"

The enigmas which Job suggests remain

insoluble. The author has no answer to make to his own questions. It is a tribute to the genius of the Hebrew seer that the reader cannot lay his book down without a certain feeling of intellectual disappointment. He is so great that he deludes us into hoping that he may offer some explanation of the inexplicable. The prophet, however, does not adventure the impossible, knowing too well that all reconcilement between God and man is individual and spiritual, impossible alike of complete apprehension by the reason and of complete expression in its terms. Job's aspirations are satisfied, but not his curiosity. The man who cried out at the beginning of his troubles: "Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might even come to his seat!" is able to say at last: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Although after the vision of moral perfection Job receives some kind of conviction of sin, the poet hastens to justify his hero. In the eyes of God, he tells his readers, Job was right in his bold search for truth, and the men who would glorify God by wresting the facts were wrong. "The Lord said to

Eliphaz, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends : for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right." But Job's new faith is strong enough to be tolerant. The end of his conversion is the forgiveness of the men who have striven to force their narrow philosophy upon him. His change of front is the consummation of his peace of mind. " And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends."

At the very last we come back to the primitive story with its conventional happy ending,—a long life, many children, great riches, and an easy death. It is something of an anticlimax, and the reader feels that he has been transported from a spiritual to an earthly atmosphere with the swiftness which only a Jew of genius knows how to compass.

CHAPTER XXXII

ST. AUGUSTINE

ST. AUGUSTINE has been called "the founder of Roman Catholicism." As a figure in the history of Christian theology it is, of course, impossible to exaggerate his importance. Yet it is not for the sake of his theology that the ordinary layman reads his writings. The world decided long ago that the "Confessions" was his greatest work,—the only one to be kept constantly in mind, and that not for its theological teaching, but because it contains "the portrait of a soul," a portrait which still carries conviction of its essential truth after a lapse of fifteen hundred years. Nevertheless, in some degree time has obscured the outline. The outpourings of religious ecstasy and the rhetorical utterances of religious desperation sound strange in our ears, and on first opening the "Confessions" we stand enchanted by "a master of words," yet bewildered amidst the ashes of a religious passion which has found in these latter days a new method of expression, and, above all, a new modesty. The ordinary

reader of to-day needs a guide among the mazes of the "Confessions,"—some learned man, at home in the fifth century, who will show him how to look for the human interest in the story, how to find the personality of Augustine, and to recognise in its still pulsating humanity some likeness to his own. Such a guide he will have found if he reads the introduction by Professor John Gibb, D.D., to the newest edition of the Latin text of the "Confessions," admirably annotated by W. Montgomery, B.D. (Cambridge University Press, 7s. 6d. net).

Augustine's absorption in religion was not so complete as to destroy his sympathy with men as men, with his fellow-creatures whether Christian or heathen. Neither his sins nor his salvation occupied his whole mind; in the background we can always perceive a keen human interest, about which, however, he is somewhat shamefaced. In the same manner, the ordinary man of to-day is not so absorbed in the affairs of his daily life—in work, ambition, friends, books, and the news—as to be indifferent to the things of the Spirit, though about those he in turn is shamefaced. Dr. Gibb brings this social side of the great theologian into prominence, at the same

time appealing to the spiritual side of the reader, and thus by means of learning and sympathy effects a very real " Introduction."

Despite his power of self-description—a power which has led certain critics, whose words cannot be lightly dismissed, to condemn his nature as " theatrical "—Augustine was no real egoist. Deeply interested in his own development, and convinced that that development must interest others, he certainly was. The recollection of himself, dating back to the first moment of consciousness, enthralls him; but too many persons have found themselves in St. Augustine, have exclaimed with Petrarch as they read the "Confessions": " I seem to be reading the history of my own wanderings, and not another's," to make it possible that he was not essentially sincere. The infant Augustine still interested Augustine the Bishop. Perhaps so convincing a description of the dawn of intelligence was never written as the following: " Little by little, I became conscious where I was; and to have a wish to express my wishes to those who could content them, and I could not; for the wishes were within me, and they without; nor could they by any sense of theirs enter within my spirit. So I flung

about at random limbs and voice, making the few signs I could, and such as I could, like, though in truth very little like, what I wished." He goes on to tell of the child goaded to learning at home by "a free curiosity," at school by "a frightful enforcement," and of the able, headstrong boy who soon experienced "a cloyedness of welldoing," with the perverse desire of youth to do what he "liked only, because it was misliked," and that terror of appearing better than his school-fellows, which still makes boys "ashamed of a less shamelessness." The great Bishop speaks of his boyish errors with what seems to us a quite disproportionate repentence. Yet he cannot bring himself to look back without pleasure, without thankfulness for his creation. "Thanks are due to Thee our God, even hadst Thou destined for me boyhood only. For even then I was, I lived, and felt; and had an implanted providence over my own well-being,—a trace of that mysterious Unity, whence I was derived."

But a man of many friends is not absorbed in himself. Augustine's letters betray, so Dr. Gibb tells us, a genius for friendship, and supply the best material we possess

for the domestic history of the fifth century. His mother acknowledged on her death-bed "that to her he had never addressed an ungentle word, although at one time she forbade him her table because of his opinions. Wherever he went, friends gathered round him, some of whom followed him over land and sea, from Church to heresy, and from heresy to the Church. Among the many descriptions in prose and verse of University life, and of the gatherings of young intellectuals, none surpass Augustine's picture of his friendly circle in Carthage. 'What charmed me in their intercourse was the talk, the laughter, the courteous mutual deference, the common study of the masters of eloquence, the comradeship now grave now gay, and differences that left no sting, as of a man differing from himself, the spice of disagreement which seasoned the monotony of consent. Each by turns would instruct or listen; the absent were always missed, the present always welcome. Such tokens springing from the hearts of mutual friends, and displayed by a word, a glance, an expression, by a thousand pretty complaisances, supply the heat which welds souls together and makes one of many.'" The "friendly circle" was

not entirely broken up by Augustine's conversion. Immediately after the spiritual crisis which changed his life, he retired for a period to the villa of a friend, where the dialogues taken down in shorthand between friends and pupils of this newly convinced Christian present very much the same picture as the one given above.

That the theologian must have been a delightful companion no attentive reader of the "Confessions" can doubt. Trenchant phrases which have passed into all European languages, and are still in everyday use, trace back to Augustine. For instance, "The biter bit," "The hopeful young man," "Life of my life," etc., etc.; his criticism of the theatre when he inquires, "Why is it, that man desires to be made sad, beholding doleful and tragical things, which yet himself would by no means suffer? yet he desires as a spectator to feel sorrow at them, and this very sorrow in his pleasure." His marvellous comprehension of the evil fascination of the gladiatorial shows, even while with all his soul he condemned them, must have delighted his hearers without regard to the religious convictions of the speaker. Occasional flashes of the common wisdom which appeals to all men light up

even those pages of ecstatic religious expression which remind us, as Harnack says, that this great man lived in "an age of depraved taste and lying rhetoric." Such a sentence as the following is worth searching to find: "Woe is thee, thou torrent of human custom! Who shall stand against thee?" Augustine's knowledge of himself gave him a wonderful insight into human nature, and his power to present in few words a person or a state of mind must continually have entertained and enchanted his friends. We see Alypius dragged, protesting and shutting his eyes, by his boisterous friends into the amphitheatre. We are made to hear that "mighty noise" which "unlocked his eyes." We see him "drinking in phrenzy, unawares," "delighted with that guilty fight, and intoxicated with the bloody pastime," and we know that he was thereby "stricken with a deeper wound in his soul than the other, whom he desired to behold, was in his body," and was afterwards not "the man he came, but one of the throng he came unto, yea, a true associate of theirs that brought him hither." Portraits, too, like the celebrated one of the half-sincere Faustus were, no doubt, doubly amusing

to those who knew the originals, at least by contemporary reputation. "This man had a heart," we read, "though not right towards Thee, yet neither altogether treacherous to himself. For he was not altogether ignorant of his own ignorance, nor would he rashly be entangled in a dispute, whence he could neither retreat, nor extricate himself fairly. Even for this I liked him the better."

Charming as are these human touches, it remains, of course, true that the chief power of the "Confessions" to rivet our attention comes from the account given us by Augustine of the struggle between good and evil, faith and doubt, which goes on for ever in the human soul. Dr. Gibb deprecates the once generally received notion that Augustine in his youth was a notoriously bad man. Harnack, also, will not hear of the theory. In a lax age he lived a life, even before his conversion, more nearly in accordance with the Christian ideal than did the majority, and his self-condemnations must be sifted before they are accepted. As a mere boy, he tells us, "I began now to arise, that I might return to Thee." There never was a time when he did not

" sigh for truth," wishing to be " as assured of the things I saw not, as I was that seven and three are ten." He knew, he tells us, from the beginning that his soul " could not be healed but by believing, and lest it should believe falsehoods, refused to be cured; resisting Thy hands, who hast prepared the medicines of faith, and hast applied them to the diseases of the whole world, and given unto them so great authority."

The " Confessions " leave no doubt but that Augustine was " cured." Whether the authority of the Church had as much to do with his restoration to spiritual health as he thought is another matter. His arguments are dull reading,—" no form of religious literature fades so quickly as apologetics," comments the author of our " Introduction." "And I heard, as the heart heareth, nor had I room to doubt," declares Augustine upon one occasion. The statement is instinct with the authority of the Spirit, and carries more conviction than any argument by which the theologian can support it, and may still inspire hope in the minds of those who have ceased to look for assurance in the devious ways of polemical discussion.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CHANGELESSNESS OF COMMON-SENSE

It sometimes seems as though common-sense were the only unchanging element in the mind of civilised man. Creeds and customs change, ideals and methods of thought vary with the ages, but common-sense is common to all times. Perhaps no more startling illustration of these truisms exists than is to be found in the treatise which Clement of Alexandria wrote on the conduct of daily life in the latter half of the second century. It is probable that every word of this advice to the Christian Churches was written before the year 202, and the greater part of it remains applicable in 1908. A philosopher of deep and mystical piety, untrammelled by dogmatism, Clement was also a keen and humorous observer of life, and almost incredibly free of prejudices. His criticisms of the social conditions of his own day, tempered as they are by strong sense, are instruments still fitted for use in the cutting of a permanent way between the ephemeral extremes of

social and, if we may say so without offence, of moral fashion.

He begins his book with the question of eating and drinking, which he discusses from the point of view of health, economy, and social enjoyment. The rich, he says, seek after luxury, to the destruction of their health and of all true hospitality. "In their greed and solicitude, the gluttons seem absolutely to sweep the world with a drag-net to gratify their luxurious tastes." From all this care and thought, however, they derive no good. They are not so strong as those whom poverty confines to plain fare, and they tend to become stupid and earthy, for, "surrounded with the sound of hissing frying-pans, and wearing their whole life away at the pestle and mortar," they "cling to matter like fire." The frugal are not only "more robust, but wiser," since "they have not buried the mind beneath food." He does not, however, wish to impose upon the Church any rule of diet whatever. "We are not to abstain wholly from various kinds of food, but only are not to be taken up about them." In his own opinion, plain meat and fish in moderate quantities without sauces, fruit, and bread

which has not been spoiled "by straining off the nourishing part of the grain," are the foods which conduce most to health and strength. He does not require everyone to agree in taste, but "let our diet be light and digestible, and suitable for keeping awake."

As to wine he takes a somewhat stricter view. "The natural, temperate, and necessary beverage for the thirsty is water," he assures us, and boys and girls ought, he is convinced, to be kept to it. There are many Christians he knows who shun wine "as far as possible," and he "admires" them. On the other hand, he insists that its use is absolutely lawful. But "it must only be a little wine that is to be used, for we must not go on to intemperate potations." Old men may well take a little more than those in middle life, seeking to counteract "the chill of age" by "the harmless medicine of the vine." "But to them also," he goes on, "let the limit of their potations be the point up to which they keep their reason unwavering, their memory active, and their body unmoved and unshaken by wine." It is a terrible disgrace even for old men to be in a state when "they think that

everything is revolving round them, and cannot count distant objects as single." Let the Church take warning, he exhorts, from the sights to be seen in the world, from those "miserable wretches who expel temperance from conviviality," and "think excess in drinking to be the happiest life." Matthew Arnold wrote of the Roman :—

> "He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,
> And crowned his head with flowers,"—

sinking, with the instinct of a poet, the sordid details of the scene beneath the floods of time. Clement wrote as a contemporary, and his description is as revolting as it is vivid. We quote it as it stands: "You may see some of them, half-drunk, staggering, with crowns round their necks like wine jars, vomiting drink on one another in the name of good-fellowship; and others, full of the effects of their debauch, dirty, pale in the face, livid, and still above yesterday's bout pouring another bout to last till next morning. It is well, my friends, it is well to make our acquaintance with this picture at the greatest possible distance from it, and to frame ourselves to what is better."

This wise Father of the Church, however,

is no ascetic. Christians are on no account to "abolish social intercourse," but only to "look with suspicion on the snares of custom." They are at liberty to accept pagan invitations if they like. But "we are to partake of what is set before us, as becomes a Christian, out of respect to him who has invited us, by a harmless and moderate participation in the social meeting; regarding the sumptuousness of what is put on the table as a matter of indifference," for "it is the mark of a silly mind to be amazed and stupified at what is presented at vulgar banquets," and "much sillier to make one's eyes the slaves of the delicacies, so that one's greed is, so to speak, carried round by the servants." The dinner is not to be the chief thing, even at a dinner-party, but "the end of a banquet is friendliness towards those who meet." The entertainment should "depend on love," as becomes "the people of peace feasting for lawful enjoyment." To this end of "lawful enjoyment" our philosopher gives much good advice, both about manners and talk. No one has any right to disgust his neighbour. No one is to eat and drink as though "eager to burst," and everyone should endeavour to keep both chin and

clothing "free of stains." "Pleasantry" is allowable—for "whatever things are natural to men we must not eradicate from them, but rather impose on them limits and suitable times"—but not "burlesque." We ought never, he thinks, "of our own accord to assume a ludicrous character." Displays of wit he deprecates; he doubts whether loud laughter conduces to social content; and he has a horror of "jibing," by which men slip easily into cruelty. "If we meet together for the purpose of increasing our good-will to each other, why should we stir up enmity by jibing?" As to improper conversation, Christians are to "stop the mouths of those who practise it by stern looks and averting the face," or by "making a mock" of the speaker, or "by a harsher mode of speech."

In matters of dress, ornament, and furniture Clement maintains his middle position between asceticism and luxury. He disapproves of feather-beds. "Sleeping on downy feathers is injurious, when our bodies fall down as into a yawning hollow, on account of the softness of the bedding." Men who do not sleep so soft will find themselves, he thinks, "fitter for emergencies." But

whatever men sleep on, let them sleep in the night and not in the day. He has no patience with "fits of uselessness, and napping." In the fashioning of clothes we should "keep clear of all strangeness." No garments should ever be worn long enough to drag, "sweeping the surface dirt of the ground like a broom." Ornaments and scents are, he thinks, unmanly, and he counts those women foolish who "obscure true beauty, shading it with gold." Let them be "bright with the ornament of intelligence." Gymnastic exercises are good for boys, conducive not only to "a healthy habit of body, but courageousness of soul," and they are also "pleasant and not unprofitable" to men so long as they can be indulged in "without dragging a man away from better employments"; neither "are women to be deprived of bodily exercise." The spectacles of the arena, however, and "dicing" are absolutely prohibited, and Clement considers that the encouraging of such entertainments is a great political mistake. "The cities which make a serious business of pastime are not wise, for cruel contests for glory which have been so fatal are not sport. No more is senseless expenditure of money."

CHANGELESSNESS OF COMMON-SENSE

Coming to the vexed question whether or no it is lawful for Christians to possess riches, Clement once more refuses to make hard-and-fast rules. He shows plainly, as does every writer in the New Testament, that his sympathy is with the poor. It is "monstrous," he exclaims, "for one to live in luxury while many are in want," and "that which is squandered on foolish lusts is to be reckoned waste, not expenditure." He detests ostentation. "Simplicity," he says, "provides for sanctity by reducing redundancies to equality, and by furnishing from whatever is at hand the enjoyment sought from superfluities. For simplicity, as the name shows, is not conspicuous, is not inflated or puffed up in aught, but is altogether even, and gentle, and equal, and free of excess, and so is sufficient. And sufficiency is a condition which reaches its proper end without excess or defect. The mother of these is Justice, and their nurse Independence." The product of the earth was, he is certain, intended for all, and it is "not for the rich to appropriate an undue share." "Riches wriggling in the grasp" of "the inexperienced" make him smile, but he does not think the experienced make much

better use of them. On the other hand, he directs that "riches are to be partaken of rationally and bestowed lovingly," and "just as it is possible to live rightly in penury of this world's goods, so also in abundance." His conclusion is that "one who fulfils the command, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' is perfect." It does not occur to him to prohibit the keeping of slaves, but he forbids all harshness in their treatment. "Domestics are to be treated like ourselves for they are human beings, as we are. For God is the same to free and bond, if you consider. Such of our brethren as transgress, we must not punish, but rebuke." Slaves are not to be called by "chirruping and whistling, and sounds made through the fingers," and no Christian in health may be carried by his slaves, nor in climbing hills "shoved up" by them. The end of all Clement's practical instruction is summed up in one sentence: "Man is by nature an erect and majestic being, aspiring after the good as becomes the creature of the One. But the life which crawls on its belly is destitute of dignity, is scandalous, hateful, ridiculous."

There are critics who think that "Titus

Flavius Clemens" came of the Imperial Flavian house, and others who lean to the idea that his father was a freedman of the Imperial household. The common-sense of the ordinary reader will lead him, we cannot help thinking, to the former conclusion. These are not " slave manners " which were inculcated by the " head of the Catechetical School at Alexandria."

CHAPTER XXXIV

"A KNIGHT-ERRANT OF GOD"

THE author of "The Holy War" was a born fighter. The Christian, he reflects, though he put on the whole harness of God, has yet "no armour for his back." "The breastplate of righteousness," the "sword of the spirit," and "the shield of faith" avail him only while he will face his foe. There were moments in his actual life, and moments in the life of his imagination, when it is impossible not to feel that Bunyan might lawfully have exercised a little discretion. His valour before the Magistrates cost him twelve years' loss of liberty, and that though it is plain from his own transparent account of the proceedings that his Judges were willing to acquit him, and would gladly have accommodated a bad law to a militant conscience had it been possible. But the sad end of his personal struggle did not for one moment discourage John Bunyan, though it made him very angry. He went to prison only to dream of a spiritual strife, a war waged by the righteous against the world.

He arraigned his Judges in the Court of Literature when he wrote of Vanity Fair, and told how old Lord Carnal Delight and Sir Having Greedy tried Faithful and sent him the nearest way to the Celestial Gate for declaring that "the prince of this town" and "his attendants" are "more fit for being in hell than in this town and country."

But if in the regenerate Pilgrim we see now and then the natural man who, in his youth, was accustomed to "set an oath before and another behind to give authority to his words," we cannot love him the less. If he had sometimes a foolhardy contempt for prudence, he had always a wholesome hatred of strategy. He was "for hazarding all for God at a clap." He took a keen pleasure in ridiculing the professor of religion who would not strive against wind and tide, but boasted: "I had always the luck to jump in my judgment with the present way of the times, whatever it was, and my chance was to get thereby." The men of his dream are men "of a very stout countenance"; as we read of them we seem to draw strength from the strong. With the unknown prophet of the New Testament, he loves to dwell upon the "worthy acts"

of heroes, how they "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens." There is a delightful little touch in that strange spiritual autobiography, "Grace Abounding," which throws light on the fighting side of Bunyan's character. He tells of a religious friend who, "though a good man, was a stranger to much combat with the devil," a peculiarity which he cites as accounting for the narrowness of his sympathies. Great as were Bunyan's spiritual sufferings at the time of his conversion, one cannot read of them and not realise that to him the joy of life was in struggle. He can forgive a great deal to "a man of his hands"; nothing to one who would "rest him content in a whole skin." The picture of old Mr. Honest, who, waking out of sleep, took a band of pilgrims for highwaymen and squared up to Great-heart by mistake, is drawn with heartfelt admiration and amusement. "What would or could you have done, to have helped yourself, if we indeed had been of that company?"

asks Great-heart, when matters have been explained. "Done!" cries the old gentleman, "why I would have fought as long as breath had been in me; and had I so done, I am sure you could never have given me the worst on it." "Well said, father Honest," quoth the guide; "for by this I know that thou art a cock of the right kind."

In the midst of his fighting scenes Bunyan is carried quite out of himself, and continually forgets his allegory. When Mr. Great-heart fought with the giant Maul, Bunyan, in his desire to see fair play and show his hero to be a generous opponent, lets him give the giant a chance, and counts it to his credit that he will not hit him when he is down. "When they had rested them, and taken breath, they both fell to it again, and Mr. Great-heart, with a full blow, fetched the giant down to the ground. Nay, hold, and let me recover, qouth he; so Mr. Great-heart fairly let him get up. So to it they went again, and the giant missed but little of all-to-breaking Mr. Great-heart's skull." The "women and children did nothing but sigh and cry all the time that the battle did last," but no sooner was the giant dead than Christiana's boys helped the conqueror to

nail his head on to a pillar and inscribe rhymes underneath. This fight is almost better told than the famous one which Christian had with Apollyon, though it lacks the picturesque opening so suggestive of the enormous size of the monster. "Then Apollyon straddled quite over the whole breadth of the way, and said, I am void of fear."

A curious boyishness—a sort of ferocious high spirits—shows itself now and then in all Bunyan's work. Our readers will remember how at the rest-houses in the way the pilgrims were constantly entertained with the sight of "rarities." They are taken to see the apple that Eve ate, and "the altar, the wood, the fire, and the knife" prepared by Abraham for the sacrifice of his son. And "when they had seen it, they held up their hands and blessed themselves, and said, Oh, what a man for love to his Master, and for denial of himself, was Abraham!" They examine, too, the hammer and the nail with which Jael slew Sisera, and Mercy asks to be shown "the byway to hell," down which poor Mr. Ignorance was thrown, and they all listen to the groans which resound from the pit with a fearful joy. A few

"rarities," however, are beautiful, and their description is simple and charming. Jacob's ladder is shown them, with "some angels ascending upon it," and the youngest boy is so pleased with the sight that he cannot be persuaded to come away.

But if Bunyan was sometimes fierce, he was always chivalrous. He has no pity whatever for the misbeliever, but for the honest doubter he is always sorry, and for the man of small strength. The portrait of Mr. Fearing is the most beautiful picture in Bunyan's gallery, but he appealed to Bunyan by reason of his daring. He always "had some doubts about his interest in the Celestial Country"; he always inclined to think that he should "perish at the last"; but in Vanity Fair he laid about him to admiration. Mr. Little-faith, on the other hand, was a man of another stamp. He could not fight, though he would not run away. He hated violence, and was never "for a brush," and invariably got the worst of it in every rough-and-tumble. Faint-heart and Mistrust beat him very nearly to death, though, "after awhile, Little-faith came to himself, and getting up made shift to scrabble on his way." He was always full of "doleful

and bitter complaints," and Hopeful made no bones about calling him a coward. Christian, however, defended him. "It was his lot," he said, "to have but a little faith," but "his mind was on things divine." Great-grace, Mr. Hopeful argues, soon frightened off Mistrust and Faint-heart. "True," says Christian, but Great-grace "is the King's champion," and "all the King's servants are not his champions." This is a touch of extraordinary kindness. That the infirmities of the weak are to be borne and not upbraided, Bunyan believed, and he tells how in danger the strong pilgrims always held themselves responsible for the weak, though they had often "much ado" to get them forward. "So it was, that through the encouraging words of he that led in the front, and of him that brought them up behind, they made a pretty good shift to wag along."

Bunyan, like all brave men of every school of thought, was willing to face facts, though a preconceived dogmatism often prevented his drawing his own deductions from them. He hated the infidel; but he admitted that the temptation to infidelity was great, and he let even the irreligious man have

his fair say. Religion, according to one of the men in the City of Destruction, is "a voluntary fondness, to venture the loss of all, for nobody knows what," or a "pilgrimage in which a man has only his travel for his pains." At times, "musing in the midst of my dumps," he was terribly tormented by the knowledge that "everyone doth think his own religion the rightest, both Jews and Turks and Moors and Pagans, and how if all our faith in Christ and the Scriptures should be but a thinking, too?" He had seen terrible things in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, "things which cared not for Christian's sword as Apollyon did." He had not been in Doubting Castle, either, for nothing. He knew that the locks, of that place "went damnable hard." He knew that God only could deliver, but he knew also that while in durance vile a sense of humour is an alleviation by no means to be despised. While Christian and Hopeful groan in a dungeon, the Giant Despair and his wife are talking in bed, and the reader is constrained to laugh, though he knows he has come to the most serious crisis in the book, and presently even the prisoners entertain themselves with hope. Christian

suggests that Despair "may, in a short time, have another of his fits," for "he sometimes, in sunshiny weather, fell into fits, and lost for a time the use of his hands."

When the City of Mansoul surrendered to Immanuel and all seditious persons were banished, Unbelief was never caught. "He was such a nimble Jack" he evaded every effort, and still lives in Mansoul, and still at times is seen by all. Bunyan was not logical. The goodness of God and everlasting perdition did not seem to him to be inconsistent, but in the Dismal Valley and in the clutches of Despair he "perceived" that God was with many of those who could neither see Him nor one another, but "continued together in the dark." He drew no logical conclusion, but the "perception" remained with him. It did not correct the narrowness of his theoretical creed, but it made his sympathies "exceeding broad."

CHAPTER XXXV

"THE FIRST TRUE GENTLEMAN"

THE Elizabethan poet Dekker said of our Lord that He was "the first true gentleman that ever breathed." All through English literature the word "gentleman" has had two meanings, and has been used to describe a man of certain qualities as well as a man of a certain birth. A hundred and fifty years before Dekker wrote it was declared that "truth, pity, freedom, and hardiness" were the essential qualities of a gentleman. Our Lord in His human nature personified these things. Every gentleman in Christendom derives his ideal from Christ, whatever may be his dogmatic creed. No virtue, perhaps, was so characteristic of our Lord as His devotion to truth. He declared before Pilate that it was the end for which He was born. He condemned all those who hindered its diffusion and tried to make it the monopoly of a caste. He tabooed all absurd asseverations, the occasional use of which was but a confession of habitual lying. He taught that lies were of the Devil, and that it was the

Holy Spirit who led men into all truth. He said that sincerity was the great light of the Spirit, that all double-minded men were in the dark, and that their fear of the light of day was their own sufficient condemnation. The ideal gentleman, all through the ages, has conformed his conduct in the matter of truth to the Christian standard. He has avoided mental reservation, abhorred lying, and, though he has garnished his speech with oaths, his yea has meant yea, and his nay nay, and he has regarded his word as his bond.

Again, courage and pity were combined in the character of Christ as they had never been combined before. Now the combination is common enough. We have the seed and can grow the flower; but every man who excels in both is in some sense a follower of Christ. The courage of our Lord, though it included physical courage, was not of that calibre which is more properly called animal, —animal courage implies a want of imagination, and is probably incompatible with pity. Christ in the garden of Gethsemane "tasted death for every man," and held out a hand of sympathy to that vast majority who must for ever regard it with strong dread.

Yet by His precepts, by His life, and by His death He taught men that fear can be mastered, though it is a form of suffering seldom altogether spared to the highest type of man. Apart from their religious significance, the trial and crucifixion of Christ form the scene in the world's history of which humanity has most reason to be proud. Christ, in His human nature, was a Galilean peasant. He excused to his face the Roman Governor who stooped to threaten a prisoner in Whom he found no fault. Judge and prisoner changed places. The distinctions of the world dissolved before the distinctions of God. At Pilate's bar all gentlemen recognise their hero, an example for ever of the powerlessness of circumstances to humiliate.

On the Cross not only did our Lord maintain that composure which witnesses to the supreme power of the soul, but with still balanced judgment He refused to impute sin to the Roman conscripts whose orders were to crucify. He made a last effort to console the grief of His mother and His friend, and set Himself to give hope and encouragement to the suffering thief who believed he was receiving the due reward

of his deeds. A genius however great, a gentleman however perfect, could imagine no story of courage more noble or more inspiring than the one set down in the Gospels.

A new pity came into the world with Christ. The lump is not yet leavened; even the white race is not yet pitiful. All the same, the emotion of pity is a power, and does, broadly speaking, distinguish Christendom from the heathen world. It is part of the ideal of all those who are conscious of having an ideal at all. Gusts of anger, both national and individual, sweep it out of sight; it is paralysed by fear, rendered blind by use and wont; again and again its scope is narrowed by the reaction which follows upon affectations and exaggerations; but it is never killed. It has been part of the moral equipment of a gentleman since Christ "went about doing good," revealing to men the secret Nature could not teach them—breaking, as it seemed to them, the uniformity of her relentlessness—the secret of the divine compassion.

The independence of mind and manner inculcated by our Lord still marks a gentleman to-day. Did He not teach that a man's

conduct must at all times be ruled by his code and not regulated by his company? He must maintain the same attitude towards life whether he find himself among just or unjust, friends or enemies. He must not salute his brethren only, nor be only kind to those that love him. He must remain an honest man among thieves, ready to rebuke an offender to his face, but still a gentleman who does not "revile again" or suffer the passion of revenge to destroy his judgment. This moral independence is the rock on which character is built. The man whose actions depend upon his environment has but a sandy foundation to his moral nature. Upon this strong rock of moral independence rest also the best manners. Self-assertion and self-distrust are singularly allied. It is the ill-assured who push in their ardent desire to be like somebody else. It is dignity rather than humility which is recommended to us in the parable of those who chose the chief seats at feasts. It is a common thing to hear it said by simple people in praise of someone they regard as pre-eminently a gentleman that "he is always the same." No doubt the publicans and sinners whose friendly advances Christ accepted without

apparent condescension said this of Him. He was so entirely Himself among them that the vulgar-minded Pharisees whispered to one another that He must be ignorant of the sort of company He was in, or surely He would make plain the gulf fixed between Himself and them. By conventionality our Lord seems never to have been bound. On the other hand, He did not wantonly overthrow the conventions of His day. When a social custom struck Him as injurious, He told those who gave in to it that it stood in the way of better things, substituting custom for conscience. On the other hand, He fell in with the usual ways of respectable people in a great many particulars, praying in a village place of worship beside Pharisees who stood up to bless themselves and publicans who dared not so much as lift their eyes to heaven, taking part in a service which was far enough removed from the sincere, spiritual, and wholly unsuperstitious worship to which He looked forward as He talked beside the well.

Christ had a horror of tyranny in every form, and He seems to have regarded it as a peculiarly heathen vice. "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them,"

He said. Some bold translators emphasise His meaning by saying "lord it" over them. Dekker was right. A true gentleman is not harsh, implacable, or capricious. The breaking of other men's wills gives him no pleasure. Christ's followers, He said, must avoid all selfish wish for ascendency. A ruler, He said, should regard himself as the servant of all. Where ruling is concerned the counsels of Christ seem, like all His most characteristic utterances, to be calculated rather to inspire aspiration in the minds of good men than definitely to regulate their action, for in more than one of the parables His words imply that an ambition to rule is a lawful ambition, and that increased responsibility may be looked to as a reward. Theoretically the Christian attitude towards power has always been the gentlemanlike attitude. Hall, the chronicler, writing in 1548, says in the "Chronicles of Henry VI": "In this matter Lord Clyfford was accounted a tyrant, and no gentleman."

It is commonly said to-day that Christianity has never been tried. Such a judgment is superficial in the extreme. The moral teaching of Christ has never been entirely carried out by any community—nor perhaps

by any man—but to speak as though it had had no great influence is sheer affectation. The white peoples have wasted, it is true, their time and their blood in quarrelling about dogma; but every Christian sect has recognised in the character of the Nazarene Carpenter who suffered upon the Cross the perfectibility of the human race, and, in their highest moments of aspiration and repentance, peoples and rulers alike have pleaded His merits before God. Nothing but this recognition could have curbed the cruel pride of the ancient world, have undermined the barriers of race and caste with a sense of human brotherhood, have cast at least a suspicion upon the theory that might is right, and made respect for women a necessary part of every good man's creed. Entirely apart from what is usually called religion in England to-day, "truth, pity, freedom, and hardiness" are the ideals of the race, because nineteen hundred years ago Christ was born in the stable of a Jewish inn.

CHAPTER XXXVI

COMMON-SENSE IN THE GOSPELS

WHATEVER men think of Christ—and there never was a time when they thought so much or so differently—it must be conceded upon all sides that He was an idealist. He preached perfection, and admitted that to perfection no man can attain. The moral goal of Christianity recedes like the horizon before the face of the pilgrim. Neither in will nor in deed can his task be completely fulfilled. No circumstances, Christ said, could exempt from the supreme duty of benevolence. Justice might not circumscribe its bounds. Blood was no barrier, creed no excuse. The whole world of action offered too narrow a field for its operation. Benevolence must control the secret thoughts of the heart. Life is not long enough for the work of the Spirit, and the best man must die confessing himself an unprofitable servant. The aim of His teaching would seem to have been to arouse in men an insatiable moral ambition rather than to lay down an absolute rule of must and must not.

But there is another side to the teaching of Christ, otherwise it would not be adapted in all things for the guidance of humanity, and would set an insufficient curb upon the fanaticism and superstition of the race. If we accept the record of the Evangelists, Christianity, as it came from the lips of our Lord, contained neither of these elements. Very few years, however, had passed over Christendom before it was hard beset by both. These evils are inherent in human nature; but there is a corrective which is inherent also, and that is common-sense. Christ brought this element into extreme prominence with the evident intention of neutralising the other two; but His divine wisdom was quickly forgotten. Fanaticism and superstition have, no doubt, a savage origin; but they can be fruitfully grafted upon a civilised stock, and may owe their life to the strict logic of the theologian, as well as to the mad emotionalism of primitive man. There is no antidote to the poisons they produce but the one used by our Lord. When He began His teaching, subservient obedience to the letter of the Mosaic law was crushing the life out of religion, and He set Himself to break the fetters of the faithful

by an appeal to their common-sense. He encouraged them to disregard any religious ordinance which stood in the way of a moral duty, and He refused to be bound by effete sacerdotal custom. There was, He implied, no virtue in an observance which had ceased to fulfil the purpose for which it was inaugurated,—the good of man. It was well to rest on the Sabbath day, but surely their own common-sense must show them that it was better to work than to allow a man, or even an animal, to continue in suffering for want of assistance. It was more important, He said—and the more common-sense His hearers had, the more they must have agreed with Him,—to make up a quarrel than to be punctual in religious exercise, and it stood to reason that character could not be affected by a meticulous devotion to rules in the matter of eating and purification.

Again and again He urged them to throw off the bonds of tribal prejudice. Such prejudice is contrary to common-sense. Only devotion to truth, He said, could ever free the mind. A man might trace his birth to Abraham and remain in bondage. A Samaritan might be a less pure-blooded

Hebrew and a less orthodox man than either priests or Levites, but if he kept the spirit of the law while they evaded it he was certainly as good a Jew and a far better neighbour. As to a man's religious opinions, they were, He said, to be judged of as every common-sense man from then to now would judge of them; not by their simplicity nor by their complexity, but by their fruits. He urged men to use their own minds to judge for themselves what was right, to preserve their mental independence, to call no man master upon earth, and to study the signs of the times remembering that conditions may alter. In accordance with this great fact of constant change and continual social evolution, He laid down a social principle which any man of average common-sense in any age and under any system of government, can understand and endeavour to take as his guide of conduct, and that is to do as he would be done by. So greatly did our Lord rely upon common-sense that where in practice the logical outcome of His teaching clashed with it He sacrificed the logic. No teacher has ever pressed the claim of want as our Lord pressed it. Making every allowance that can be made for Eastern metaphor,

He exalted the duty of practical compassion and enjoined the sacrifice of wealth for the relief of suffering with far more reiteration than most of the comfortable like to remember. The evidence of His own words is not the only evidence we have in the matter. The impression they made upon His immediate followers was indelible and definite, and each writer in the New Testament corroborates the other. Nevertheless, He instantly defended the expenditure of money upon a useless token of affection and reverence, and roughly silenced the Disciple who argued that the poor was thereby robbed. He would not for one moment allow it to be said that a rich man could not be a good man, nor allow the deduction that, since He made of immorality so great a sin, celibacy might be intrinsically better than matrimony.

The directions given by our Lord to those whom He sent on missionary work are so completely in accordance with common-sense that they would seem almost commonplace had the very language of the Authorised Version not become sacred to us. He said that in going to a strange town they were to "enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide." In other words, they were not to

neglect the advantage to their work of a favourable public opinion. He said they were to eat what was set before them—that is, we suppose, to indulge no Jewish scruples or personal fancies to the inconvenience of their hosts—and they were to bless the house. Evidently, however, they were not to imagine their blessing to contain any miraculous virtue, and so give currency to superstition, for Christ assures them that if peace be not already there, then no form of words will confer it.

One of the most remarkable things about the attitude of our Lord in this matter of common-sense is that He insists that it should be applied not only where it obviates, but where it creates, a difficulty. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered," He said; and He would not admit the doctrine of chance even in the case of animals. Nevertheless, He pointed out the unreasonableness of being continually on the look out for visible Providential interventions and for judgments. He put it to their common-sense whether there were not many widows in poverty at the time of Elias, and whether there had not been plenty of sinners in every age as bad as those on whom the Tower of

Siloam fell. It is absurd to deny that the reasoning landed its hearers in a difficulty and left them there, and was intended to do so. Plainly, we are to face the facts, however severely our faith may be tried by them.

But perhaps our Lord's example was a greater tribute to the common-sense element in Christianity than even His words. He lived the life of His time, refusing neither common duties nor common amusements. He compared Christianity to a leaven, to a stuff which is useless except in conjunction with the lump. Intensely as He dreaded, and unconditionally as He condemned, the evil of the world, He would not pray for His dearest friends that they should not share in its life. The masculine good sense which played so large a part in the teaching of Christ's immediate followers, while it guided never lessened the dynamic force of their religious fervour. It is an essential part of Christianity. Take it away, and religion indeed remains—for man's sense of the supernatural is not dependent upon his reasoning power—but it is religion at the mercy of all manner of evil influences and every form of insane excess. Pillar-saints and persecutors were not all bad men, and

many of them were religious ones; but if Christ be the pattern for Christians, then Christians they were not, and to put their crimes and follies down to Christianity is palpably unfair.

It was part of the justice of our Lord that He did not deny the *bona fides* of His opponents. Some persecutors, He said, would go to the length of murder and think they did God service; but He added that they "neither know me nor my Father,"—that is, they had not grasped the meaning of Christianity either in its human or its divine aspect. They had not understood either the idealism or the common-sense of Christ.

CHAPTER XXXVII

"THE LORD'S FREEMAN"

"THE truth shall make you free," said Christ. "Beware of that freedom!" has been through all the ages the comment of ecclesiasticism. "We do not claim it," cry the upholders of authority, "and look what we have accomplished without!" From time to time brave men have clamoured for their birthright of liberty. They are clamouring now. Yet even to-day in how many Churches and in how many hearts is the servile warning sounding, "Beware of mental liberty, beware!" Which of us has not heard it in his own? For it is not the Levites only who would take away the key of knowledge. Science has also her obscurantists. "Let that range of facts alone," cry the bigots of materialism. "Look where we point, and you will see as much as is good for you. It has sufficed us, and heaven knows we have served our generation. Let it suffice you. What ails you that you want to judge for yourselves what is right?"

they ask in unconscious parody of the question of Christ. "It is retrograde, all this gazing into heaven and groping among old-world myths and traditions. We see nothing where you imagine so much. Keep behind us, and we will show you the way." Once more the voice of Christ counsels rebellion. "Can the blind lead the blind?" Then, though they make less show, there still exist both inside and outside the Churches a powerful school of moral obscurantists. "Take heed that the light which is in thee be not darkness," said Christ. "Beware of that light!" they warn the world. "It is apt to show things quite out of proportion unless kept shaded. If too many people walked by its naked flame, they would turn the world upside down. It is a useful light under suitable bushels. A very simple arrangement of the shades will enable any man to see his way to serve both God and Mammon," they explain, stopping their ears to the eternal *non possumus* of the uncompromising Gospel. "And good men have done it in the past," they urge, quoting Moses like the Pharisees before them. But Christ allows no man to take shelter in the shades of the past. Things were sufferable in a

harder generation which are not sufferable now, He taught.

But it may be said: "Do you think that it is every man's duty to take to pieces the creed in which he was brought up, in which he has found strength, consolation, and a guide of life, and prove or disprove it item by item to his own satisfaction or dissatisfaction?" By no means; but he must not stand in the way when other men would do so. If, as he considers his creed, he is able to exclaim with Hezekiah, "O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit," then he knows it by its fruits to contain sufficient spiritual truth for his sustenance. Take a parallel instance in the physical world. If a man is in good health, and attributes his health to a given manner of life, it is not necessary for him to study therapeutics unless he likes. But he should not advise a friend with a constant headache or a bad cough to a similar indifference, much less condemn the doctors who study to prove all things. To do so is the act of a fool or a bigot. And if he himself begins to feel uneasy, to suffer physical pain and discomfort, to doubt whether his theory of health will hold water, surely he

should not refuse to examine his condition or to take advice of the learned. If he is so senseless as to act thus, he will probably lose first his physical peace, then his physical courage, then his physical health, and last of all his life. The same thing is true in spiritual matters. One may, of course, encourage little doubts and scruples by thinking about them, just as one may imagine little aches and pains ; but, broadly speaking, the best hope for the cure of doubt lies in inquiry. It may be very hard to investigate the beliefs of our childhood, but their power is gone when we suspect them, and it may return on investigation. There is no suggestion in the Gospel that it is a virtue to suppress thought, and, as it were, break the will of the mind by forcing it to accept what it instinctively rejects. Indeed, we are told that all sincere men desire light. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light."

We cannot, of course, hide from ourselves that the Evangelists did, in certain instances and in the most transparent good faith, ask us to accept explanations of events which reason to-day forbids us to accept. But honest belief in a mistaken theory is no reflection on any man's sincerity. Men

followed the light long before they knew that the earth went round the sun. The Apostles knew that Christ did rid the souls of men of those wild and evil impulses which they personified as devils, and they misinterpreted certain coincident phenomena. Again, there are doctrines to be found in the Epistles which strike many Christian consciences nowadays as incompatible with Christ's conception of a perfect God. This is a difficulty; but faith would surely lead us to suppose that such a scruple is inspired. We can hardly imagine that God would tempt us to error by means of a moral scruple arising from zeal for His glory. The bare suggestion of divine deceit approaches to blasphemy. Such a theory would overthrow the whole of Christ's teaching. "God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar!" the Christian must exclaim in presence of such a theory.

Those votaries of physical science, who guide their lives upon principles of utilitarian morality, may fairly claim the same justification for their attitude as we have claimed for the adherent of a past orthodoxy. It is certainly not for the upholders of liberty to call them to repentance. But we may

say without intolerance that these ostensible devotees of light are less excusable than any other set of people, when they suppress those misgivings which might lead to religion, or scoff at others who desire to investigate them.

Once more, are there not many people who, while devoutly believing in some form or other of the Christian faith, are horribly troubled by doubts as to whether Christian morality, as Christ taught it, is really that sanction for things as they are which such a vast crowd of worshippers take it to be,—whether the time-honoured explanations which we put upon the startling paradoxes of Christ are the true explanations, or whether we do not very often make His words of none effect by our tradition? No man, we think, will be able to read one of those editions of the New Testament in modern English which have lately given so much offence to religious conservatism, and not be horribly shaken by some such doubts as we have suggested. He is very likely to come away sorrowful, like the young man in the Gospel,—hampered by moral indecision.

We must never overlook the fact, so frequently insisted on by our Lord, that the

sincere pursuit of light entails much sacrifice, and, indeed, in some sense a great risk. Very often, no doubt, a man may find he has gained more than he has lost,—an assurance that the existence of God and immortality do not depend on dates and authorships, or on historical and scientific verdicts; that the revelation of Christ is not dependent upon its exact mode of transmission to us; that if God ever inspired men, He inspires them still, and that we may obtain faith not only by the record of other men's inspiration, but by our own. On the other hand, it is only an optimistic form of obscurantism to deny that many men who inquire devoutly with their whole minds, and follow the light of conscience in every particular of life, do not always obtain the religious assurance for which they long. Neither is it a certainty that the most sincere student of spiritual matters, starting from the materialist position, may not return to it. If there were no mischance there would be no heroism. These things happen, and we must open our eyes to them. As Christians, we can only say that for the full destruction of that "religion for hirelings" which, with its emblems of the bait and the scourge, threatened at

one time to turn Christianity into a police force, it was necessary that certain good men should serve God for naught as an object-lesson to the Churches that the Holy Spirit needs the help of neither goad nor reward in impelling men to goodness. But the fear of such a fate—and it is a sad one—should no more deter a brave man from inquiry than the chance of death by accident should deter him from an active life. The support of an infallible authority, resident either in a Church or a volume, has in the providence of God been taken from the vast majority of thoughtful Christians. It is hard for those who kick against the pricks and will not see the signs of the times. Surely it is better to go forward with what courage we may, believing that while we follow the light of reason and conscience no commandment of men can cut us off from the fellowship of Christ, and able to say with John Wesley "If I die, I die at Thy door; if I sink, I sink in Thy ship." If Christ's words are true, whoever does this is "the Lord's freeman," delivered from the powers of darkness, and needing to call no man master upon earth.

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CONTENTS

PAGE

THEOLOGY 3

SERMONS AND RELIGIOUS ESSAYS . . 5

THE GOSPEL AND THE AGE SERIES . 8

DEVOTIONAL 9

SCRIPTURE 10

MISCELLANEOUS 11

RELIGION AND POLITICS . . 13

EDUCATIONAL 13

BIOGRAPHY, ETC. . . . 14

ENGLISH CATHEDRAL SERIES . . 16

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